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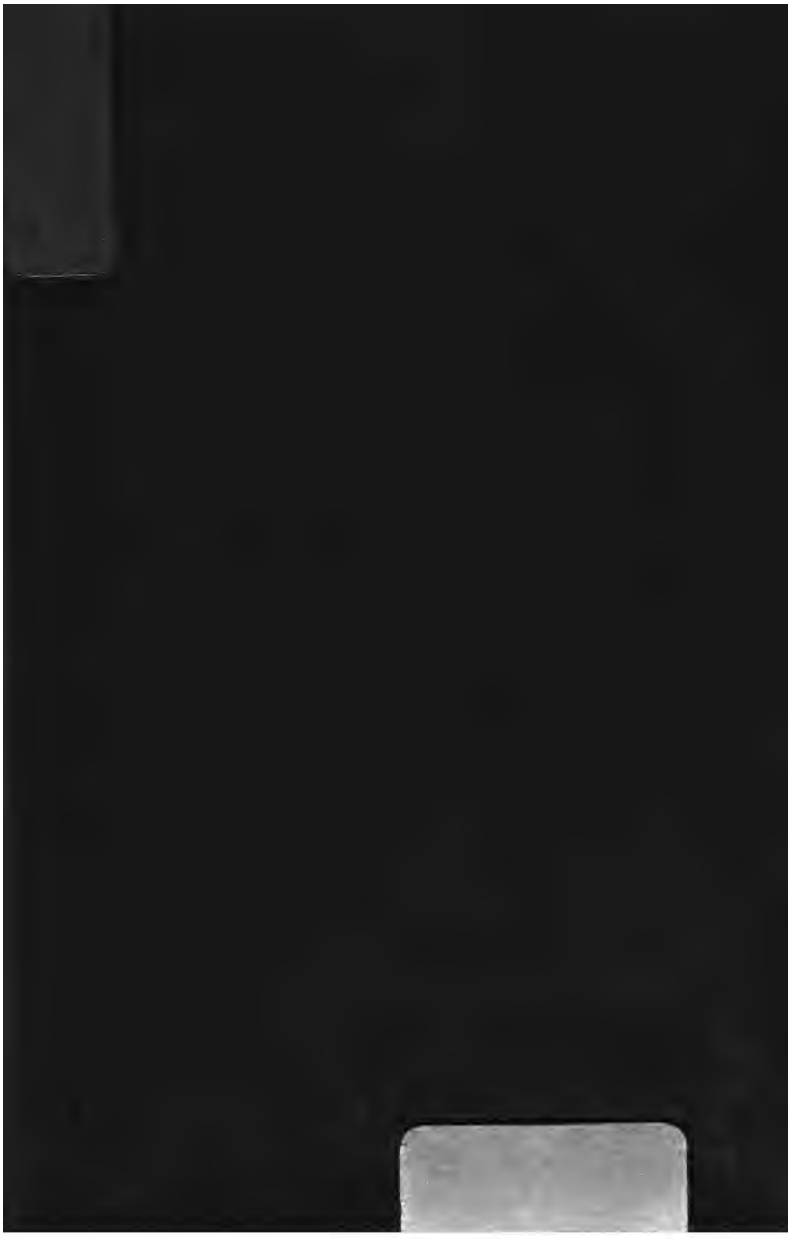

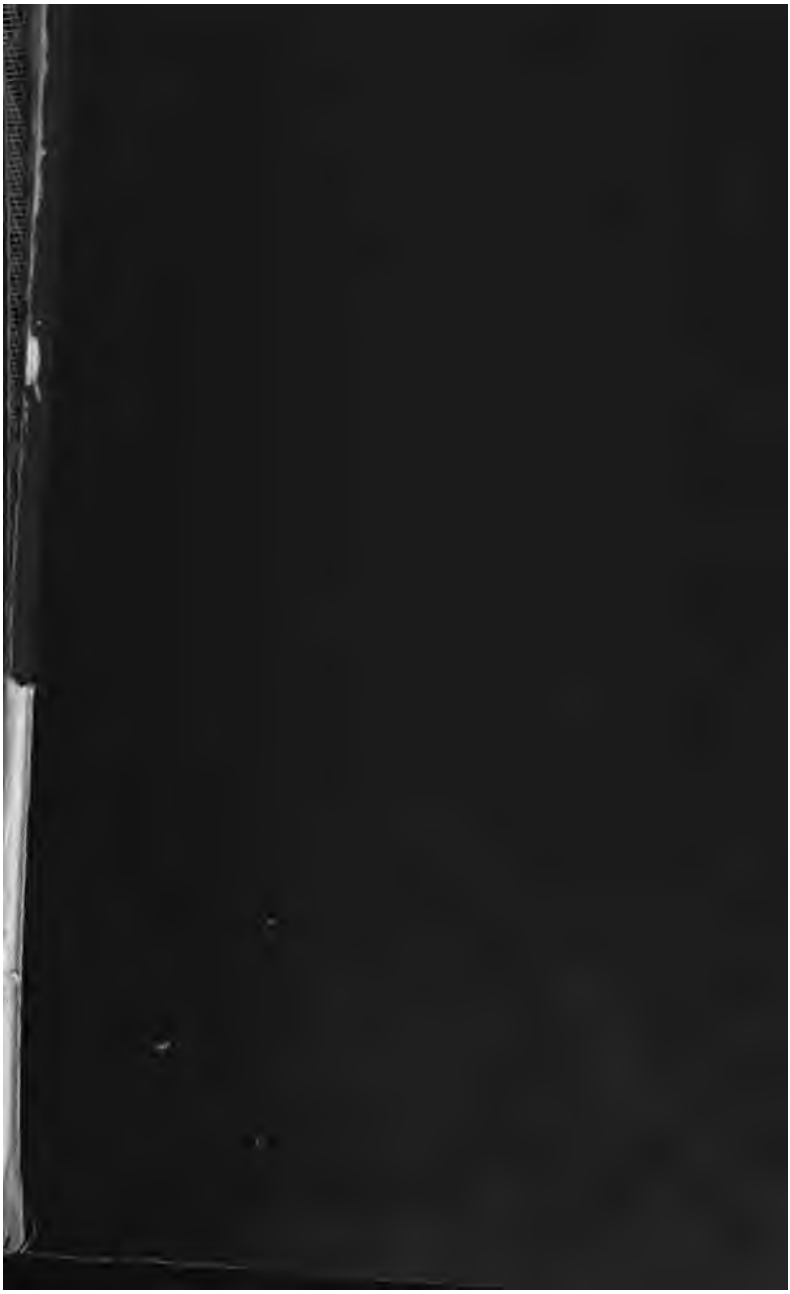

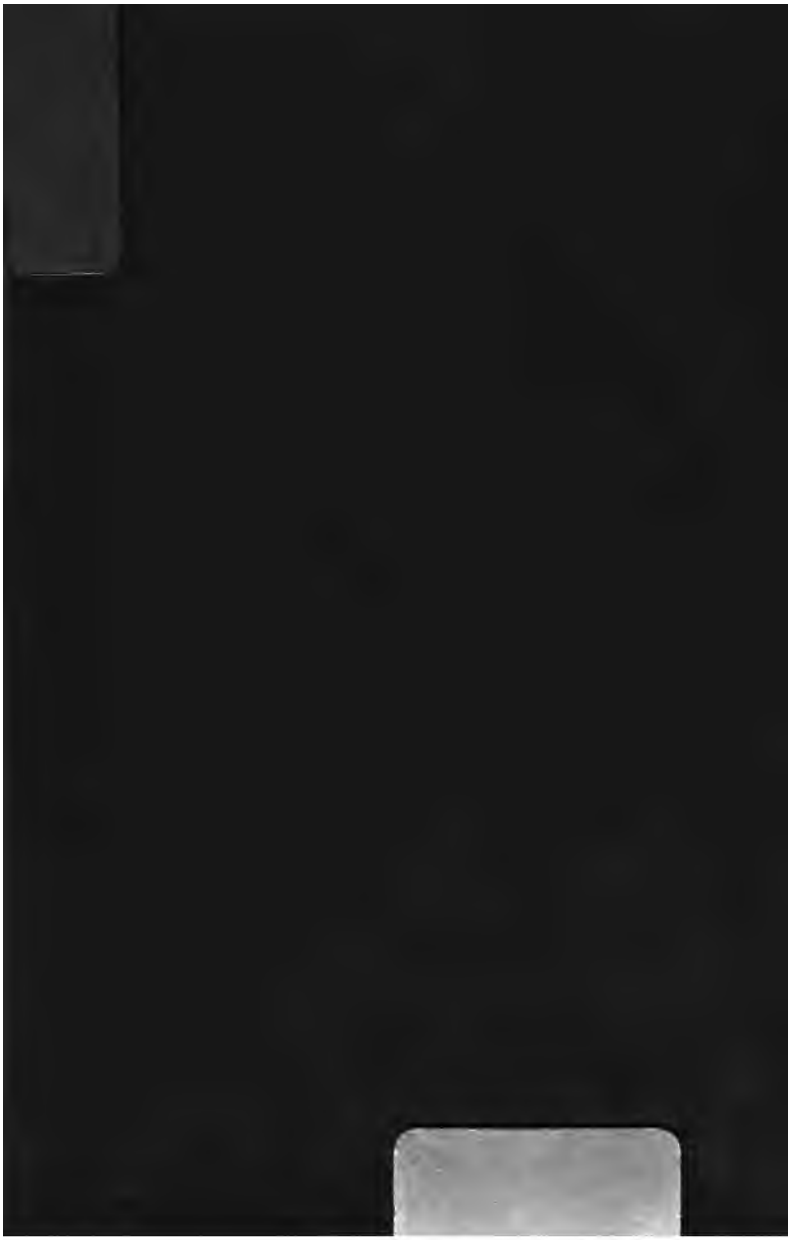

MISS WILTON

BY

CORNELIA WARREN

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The Riverside Press, Cambridge, Mass., U. S. A.
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MISS WILTON.

CHAPTER I.

On a mild day in October a carriage was waiting before the door of a small hotel in one of the quieter streets of New York. At the window of its reception-room stood Miss Wilton, dressed for a journey and putting on her gloves. She was a woman of twenty-five years, tall, with light-brown hair, to which a gleam of sunshine gave a tint almost golden. Her figure was erect, her movements quick and effective, betraying both youth and health.

She had landed only the day before from a European steamer, and, unaccompanied except by her maid, had presented herself at this hotel, where her appearance had insured her a respectful reception. She was, however, the object of some curiosity, and as she stood by the window was accosted by the landlady, who had followed her into the room.

"You have a beautiful day," she said, basing her remark on an interlude of fitful sunshine.

"It is warm, certainly," returned Miss Wilton, "but the clouds look showery. I have sent my maid for an umbrella."

She made no further remark, and the landlady

slipped out as the maid came down carrying a book and an umbrella. The maid was hardly more than a girl, her face not pretty, unless Madame Swetchine was right in saying that every woman who has been young has been pretty, and her look and accent were foreign, though she spoke in English.

"I 'm glad you brought the book, Elsa," said Miss Wilton, taking it from her. "I shall be fully two hours on the cars either way."

"And Mademoiselle travels quite alone?"

"Of course; this is America, the land of freedom. Besides, I shall be back by dark. Well, good-bye," she added, with an extremely bright look towards the girl; "keep a warm corner in your heart for me, for this is really a plunge into the cold world. They are relatives, to be sure, but relatives are like summer houses, the chilliest resorts imaginable when the season is backward."

All day long Elsa watched the weather closely, and indeed it furnished her much occupation. The sun went continually in and out among the clouds, and the wind blew, first mildly like a June breeze, then rushing as if it had millions of dead leaves to keep aloft. At one there was a shower, then the wind became colder, the sky more gray, and when the time for Miss Wilton's return had come, the fine rain had been falling for an hour, and the night had crept on early.

Miss Wilton was not wholly accurate in saying that she was going among relatives. It would have been hard for her to find any one in New York or vicinity who was related to her by blood. Her

mother had died when she was ten years old, and her father eight years later. Mr. Wilton had been an active, ambitious stock-broker in New York, and having no aunt or sister near there to whom to confide the charge of his daughter, he solved an embarrassing problem in a manner convenient to himself by sending her at the age of sixteen to a foreign school. Here she was occasionally visited by a Mrs. Gordon, an American resident abroad, who had chosen the school for her. Hearing of her father's sudden death by accident, Miss Wilton returned to America at once, with the idea of remaining there; but finding no home for herself near New York, and discovering that there was no one to say her nay if she chose to consider her education at an end, she wrote to Mrs. Gordon, begging to be allowed to join her at Florence. Mrs. Gordon had consented, and for nearly a year they were together. But this could not last. Miss Wilton had no real claim on Mrs. Gordon, while others had. Besides, the young girl had inherited from her father not only a very comfortable income, but an imperious and somewhat wayward disposition. Independence became more and more necessary to her, and at length, parting with Mrs. Gordon in entire friendliness, she engaged a maid, and began a wandering life, attaching herself occasionally to parties of acquaintances and showing great cleverness in managing for herself, but still irresponsible, purposeless, and exposed to misunderstanding and the rougher sides of travel. After six years of such desultory wanderings, she decided to extend her investigations to her native land, and she

brought with her a young girl whom she had first found in Alsace, and who had now followed her fortunes with unswerving devotion for over a year.

It was in the month of October that she landed in New York, and the morning after her landing she started, as has been said, for a trip to the country. Her destination was a little town in Connecticut with which she had childish associations. Her uncle, John Hastings, had lived there, and her mother had often taken her there till her uncle died. He was a victim to consumption, and the same disease, a few years later, robbed her of her mother. Mr. Hastings's widow had married a Mr. Garth, and now for the second time a widow, had retired to the old place with three daughters, all Garths. It was the place, rather than the people, that drew Miss Wilton to make this visit, and yet she had need of advice, feeling far more alone in her native city than she had ever done in Paris, Florence, or Vienna.

She had given no notice of her arrival, and of course was not met, but she thought she could find the way by memory, after a few general directions from the ticket agent.

The main street of the town was utterly unfamiliar to her, but when she turned at right angles into a wide road, turfed in the middle, and bordered by square, roomy white houses, she began to feel a suggestiveness about the place. The houses were not as large as she thought they would be, but were set in greenness and plenty, and the sweet, crooked apple-trees, yellowing maples, and vine-bestraggled stone walls were New England through and through.

Possibly it was partly due to the change from the bare, salt, ocean, but even to Miss Wilton it seemed very characteristic and beautiful. The wind was warm; the bushes and grass were soaked with rain; odors of box and old-fashioned flowers stole to her from the many gardens; even the rail fences had a fresh smell. A strong excitement came upon her. She felt as if she were walking back into her childhood. From step to step her eagerness grew. Now she was passing some very tall elms surrounding an old pump, and now she saw the old grocery-shop, with the same sign, E. B. & T. E. Waters. Suddenly she stopped, and her heart came up in her throat. Was this more than fancy? In the doorway stood old Mr. Waters himself, exactly as she remembered him. For a moment she thought she was arriving with her mother for a visit at Uncle John's, and had run ahead to surprise Mr. Waters and get weighed. As she stood, Mr. Waters turned and looked at her. Under his indifferent gaze the present returned. How should he recognize little Lillie Wilton, now such a different person? She would not speak to him. She had really changed too much to like to measure it in such a way. Her heart was heavy as lead as she passed the old man, but she did not even look up.

This experience Miss Wilton repeated in the evening to Elsa, who was always her confidant, — indeed, her only one. She went on to describe her further adventures, in a voice far from buoyant.

"That is all the interesting part of my trip. The rest is very commonplace. Mrs. Garth was at home,

and would see me in a few minutes. So I sat down in a stuffy room, between a rosewood piano and a pyramidal bookcase. Mrs. Garth appeared, made up her mind to shake hands, and said she was glad to see me. Would I excuse her appearance? She had been superintending preparations for Thanksgiving. Had I had a good passage, etc. Presently we jumped into the business before us. I said that I had no plans, except to live in New York. This remark congealed the few signs of life she had hitherto shown. In that case she had nothing to suggest. All my father's relatives were in the West. Mr. Kelway, formerly my father's partner, had a house in New York, where his wife and daughter were now living, but he himself was usually in the West. It was said that he did not enjoy his home. That was a loss to me, for Mr. Kelway had been a firm friend of my father, and would have liked to serve me. Where was I staying now? Her house was unfortunately full at the moment. She hoped Annie would not forget to put in the citron. I took up my cloak and she interposed.

"'Oh, don't hurry. Would n't it be a good plan to call on Mrs. Kelway? She has a large house on her hands, and not as much to spend as she might wish. She would not take boarders, but might give you the protection of her home, if it involved no expense. I will write out the address.'

"Well, I took it, and went out into the hall, which still had the square, white staircase.

"'Was n't Uncle John's study opposite?' I asked.

"'Yes, would n't you like to walk in?'

"I went in, and she followed me with an exasperating air of conscientious determination to do all that could be expected of her. I admit that I was angry when I found my grandfather's portrait displaced.

"'Who is that man?' I asked.

"'My late husband,' said Mrs. Garth patiently.

"'And what have you done with my grandfather?'

"'I don't remember any such portrait. Your mother must have taken it.'

"Well, I came away rather dismal, I must say. All my people have just been wiped out of the world, and my Uncle John's home is n't home any more. I believe she said something about a reunion at Thanksgiving. I had rather give thanks in our family lot in the town graveyard, for the Garths have n't invaded that yet. Now, Elsa, I ask you what we are to do next. It 's all very well for you to smile and say that Mademoiselle always knows what to do. Shall we go to that attractive household of the Kelways, where the husband prefers to live in the West?"

"Is it impossible that Mademoiselle should live in the country? It *is* pretty, as Mademoiselle says."

"Elsa, please! You are going back to first principles. Grass and dew and sweet-scented gardens are all very well, but — well, I think our New York poet has expressed the local feeling when he calls them 'but the solemn decorations all of the great tomb of man.' One does not wish to live in a cemetery."

Whether Miss Wilton had really some satisfactory

project in mind, or whether the light-heartedness of youth prevailed to divert her thoughts, she did not further discuss the situation either that evening or the next day, but instead made ready to dine at the house of a Mrs. Woodford, an acquaintance made on the steamer, where several of her fellow-passengers had promised to be present. Elsa, however, gave the matter serious if useless consideration. Devoted as she was to her young mistress, who seemed to her as sunny-haired a vision of loveliness as ever inspired a poet's devotion, she yet saw that there were two sides to the unpleasant dialogue so frankly reported, and she dreaded lest Miss Wilton, even within reach of old associations, would lead a life as unprotected and erratic as in any foreign capital.

It was not that Elsa had in mind any memories especially painful, except indeed in one instance, and even in this case she was by no means clear as to the facts of the situation. It was shortly after she had left her Alsatian home, really for love of the face and gracious manner of this transatlantic stranger. They had traveled to Munich and to Vienna, and at this latter city Miss Wilton was very gay-hearted; very sweet, too, and kindly towards her new adorer. Nevertheless, Elsa had seen her in moments of troubled reflection, and knew that she sometimes lay awake at night. Once Miss Wilton laughingly declined to pay her further wages only to swell a hoard which did no one any good. Elsa thereupon brought out four napoleons and offered them as a loan, which to her amazement was eagerly accepted. This had long ago been repaid, though Elsa in her

devoted loyalty would have been pleased to have it forgotten.

Then came that dreadful time which, because never explained, still overshadowed Elsa's mind. She had returned home about dusk, to find that Miss Wilton had packed everything into her trunks. She was told that they were to take the evening train for Paris, and that the trunks were to be called for at a side-door of the hotel during the dinner-hour. Elsa was to see them off and lock the rooms; but was expressly instructed not to mention their departure to any one, as her mistress did not wish the whole household after her for fees. The trunks were taken away, Miss Wilton returning from dinner in time to see the last one go, but just as it was disappearing the chambermaid came down the corridor and asked with surprise if they were leaving.

"For a night or two," said Miss Wilton; "we keep the rooms."

Elsa started at this falsehood, and the conviction suddenly flashed on her that this was an attempt to leave without paying hotel dues. Miss Wilton turned on her angrily.

"Obey me, will you? Bring out the small things and lock the door. Franciska, ask Herr Meyer to step this way."

"Herr Meyer is out, gnädiges Fraülein. It is a 'Fest.'"

"Then you must get me a cab at the side-door. You will not object to a few gulden?"

Franciska took them with a courtesy and the mumbled remark about hand-kissing common in accept-

ing such favors. She was obedience itself and went off with the hand-luggage in her sturdy arms. Miss Wilton took the key of the room from Elsa's hand, and they both followed. The trunks had already gone. Elsa stood stunned and heart-sick at the carriage-door, trying to believe that she was mistaken. These feelings were succeeded by a sense of unbearable horror and shame as the figure of Frau Meyer appeared suddenly behind them. Even now that more than a year had passed, Elsa writhed at the memory and left her chair to pace the room. Miss Wilton, however, accosted her at once and informed her of her absence for a night or two.

"If it rains, you must stay over," returned Frau Meyer. "One needs good weather for this trip."

She followed them to the door, where Franciska put them into a cab.

"Go on, now," called Miss Wilton. "Auf Wiedersehen."

"The key," exclaimed Elsa, as they drove away. "Mademoiselle forgot to give it up."

"It 's too late," said Miss Wilton dryly. "I will send it by mail."

And that was the end; and after that Elsa had often rehearsed the evening's events, and had vainly tried to make anything less than dishonesty out of it. Miss Wilton had afterwards told her that Herr Meyer, besides being destitute of good breeding, had dealt dishonestly in the matter of some jewelry confided to him. Elsa could easily believe much to his discredit. As to the reputation far dearer to her, no word had ever passed between them.

While Elsa was thus revolving her unwelcome memories, Miss Wilton had arrived at the house of her hostess.

Mrs. Woodford and her daughter Ruth had been fellow-passengers with Miss Wilton on the recent voyage, having first met her on the journey from Paris to London, and they had always shown themselves very kind. Mrs. Woodford was particularly pleased with her new acquaintance, and she had insisted that Miss Wilton should dine with them within forty-eight hours after landing, and thus make Mr. Woodford's acquaintance. When Miss Wilton, attired wholly in white, entered the drawing-room, she found that Mr. Woodford was the only stranger, for the others had all been passengers with her. Mrs. Woodford kissed her warmly on both cheeks.

"Ah, Lilla, it 's an age since we parted. You look well, but we all for that matter have a certain glorified appearance, now that we have burst our cocoons. This is Mr. Woodford, Lilla; not a myth, as you now see. Every one else you know."

Miss Wilton was taken out to dinner by a Mr. Robertson, by which arrangement she was much pleased. On the steamer she had known him less well than any other man of those she had met, and she had a real curiosity in regard to him. His friend, Robert Seton, now opposite her, she had seen constantly, and he was certainly the handsomer man. She had, however, been so much with him that she was grateful to Mrs. Woodford for not recalling the fact too pointedly now.

"We have a common friend, I hear," said Robertson, "in Mrs. Gordon, of Florence."

"Oh, do you know her?" asked Lilla, with interest.

"I had letters to her from Mrs. Lemuel Gordon, her sister-in-law, and for a fortnight I saw her constantly. She is so lovable! I have a real weakness for women of her age and tender-heartedness."

"She is simply charming," said Lilla, "and to me was goodness itself. I wish I had known that you were a friend of hers."

"I knew that you were, but on the steamer I was too desperately bad-tempered to make use of the fact; indeed, I talked to no one."

"And I, who supposed that you had become spoilt for American society!"

"I am. I am spoilt for any society, but it is not Europe that has spoilt me."

"What has?" asked Miss Wilton.

"I 'm not proud of it. I 'm simply out of tune for the moment. The probabilities are, that the instrument must tune up to the orchestra and not *vice versa*."

"Yet in Europe you were in tune."

"No, not with society. You must understand that I have no objection to my individual fellow-men, if they will allow themselves to be dealt with as such. That, however, is not what is meant by society. Society is really a fabulous monster when you come to hunt him down. You may have heard of cases where worthless, back-stairs intriguers have concealed the death of a king, and continued to issue edicts in his name. This king has never existed, but his edicts are wonderfully peremptory."

"Yet you evidently conform, Mr. Robertson, and

if you did not, your non-existent tyrant might be able to enforce a penalty."

"It is we who, in our slavishness, inflict it on each other. It is, for instance, partly in fear of you that I tie my cravat just like Seton's, and neglect to ask Mrs. Woodford for another plate of my favorite soup."

"Oh, if you come to that, I help to enforce laws of which I approve. I think such restrictions very useful."

"If you will never enforce any but your own laws, Miss Wilton, I am overjoyed to have made your acquaintance. I have now some hope of a constitutional government."

Lilla's seriousness gave way, and her girlish laughter sounded so pleasantly in a momentary silence that Seton, who had been watching her rather gloomily, now spoke to her with a decided brightening of expression.

"How did you succeed at the custom-house with your 'cocoons?' — to use Mrs. Woodford's felicitous phrase."

"Oh, I never have any trouble. When I last saw you, Mr. Seton, you were sitting patiently on a pile of them, as if you expected to spend the night."

"They were Mr. Robertson's. My uncle and Fred had taken mine. I confess I did not see the fun of driving directly to our bachelor rooms. It takes a woman or two to make home-coming really a success. So I sat about on Robertson's trunks for the privilege of seeing him get home."

There was a certain pathos about this to those who

knew that Seton's mother had married a second time, going far away, and that his few relatives in New York were a burden rather than a comfort to him. Lilla wondered, however, following the theories to which her sex is prone, what woman was the special attraction to Seton at the Robertsons'. Evidently not Miss Robertson, dignified as she was. She was present this evening, and played on the piano exceedingly well, after dinner. Lilla knew that a Mrs. Monroe and her daughter were a part of the household at the Robertsons', but it was rumored that Miss Monroe was engaged to Mr. Robertson.

"Are we to see you at the Lamberts' ball, Miss Wilton?" asked Seton, under cover of the general conversation.

Lilla was somewhat annoyed at the question, because she really wished very much to go to this ball. She had won her way with every one she cared about on the steamer except the Lamberts, and her failure with them was marked because those she was with the most were their personal friends. She answered, therefore, with some constraint. "I shall be forced to decline, unless I am invited. To tell the truth, they are not the sort of people with whom one makes acquaintance by accident," —

She stopped; then went on, smiling: —

"Unless the accident were one of birth or fortune."

"Don't judge the family by the two you have seen," said Seton. "They *are* rather unapproachable, but Mr. Lambert and the younger sisters atone

for them by the most delightful *savoir vivre.* I consider Mr. Lambert and Miss Grace as forerunners of a new school of American manners, which, however, I fear I shall never live to see in the ascendant."

"Founded on democracy and kindliness, I suppose you mean," said Mr. Woodford, who heard this last sentence. "That *is* in the ascendant, I take it, if you leave out of account the exotic growths in our larger cities."

Seton shook his head significantly. "I fear, sir, that you are not following the signs of the times. The whole tramp of the social army of martyrs is towards distinction, the more western we are, the more eager for that. Indeed, we in New York are the more democratic in practice, for, having lost hope of distinction, we aim for pleasure, and pleasure *is* more or less democratic."

Mr. Woodford expressed his disapprobation, but did not reply, and Robertson took up the defense.

"I think there is plenty of democracy and kindliness East and West, but, as Seton suggests, they don't have their fair influence in societies whose chief lack is certainly distinction. Our exotic growths, as Mr. Woodford calls them, by education and polish develop this distinction or inward self-respect, and this self-respect, whether developed or natural, first enables one to be truly democratic. So far, however, those who have won this distinction have been unduly influenced by Europeans who have the same tastes but wholly different ideals. It remains, I think, for the truly distinguished American to assert his

birthright in social as in political matters and take leave to enjoy all classes of his fellow-men, with or without grammar, in society or out, with no fear of man before his eyes. We have now and again an example of such Americanism, enough to give us hope."

There was no chorus of approval after this rather dark saying. In fact, Miss Robertson laughed, and Mrs. Woodford, being thereby encouraged, laughed also, and replied : —

"I fear I shall have to be much more distinguished than I am before I thoroughly enjoy a lack of grammar."

The time passed pleasantly, with music interwoven. Seton went home with his friend, in order to finish the evening with a cigar.

The two men were of about the same age, and had been at school and college together. Seton had never had a home in New York; his family had come from Baltimore, and were now widely scattered. His father and his uncle had married sisters, and in neither case had the wife gained the confidence of her husband nor the devotion of her children. The two families grew up, each ready to fall apart as soon as circumstances would allow. Both of these brothers had died. A third, who remained unmarried, was well known as a club man, and indeed was little besides. Seton's mother had married again, and gone elsewhere. The other Mrs. Seton was in New York, and Bob saw her and his cousins more or less. Though his own income was limited, money was still more scarce in his aunt's numerous family, and as

far as he was able, he was very kind to them, making up in some measure for his Uncle Will's indifference to family claims. Seton was connected with a banking establishment, though his tastes were not at all in the line of business.

Arnold Robertson was the son of a Scotchman, who had come to New York as a young man, having first lived in Nova Scotia. From the start, he had been prudent and successful in his undertakings. He had married an American woman, and by her had four children. Mary, the eldest, and Arnold were born within a year of each other, but the other two were much younger, so that when the father and mother had died, the elder children were left almost in the position of parents to the younger. It was now two years since Mr. Robertson's death. It had been a terrible shock to Arnold, coming at a time when he had learned to love and honor his father beyond any other man and yet was too young to understand him fully or to be of great service to him. If he could have foreseen by a few weeks that he must step at once into his father's place and shoulder a man's responsibilities, he would have had much to ask while his father was yet able to answer his questions and to speak to him as to one no longer a boy. He was but twenty-four years of age and scarcely more than out of college, and it was but ten days before his father's death that he fully understood what was coming. After that, the moments of serious, clear intercourse had been very few. The business went at once into other hands. The decision as to his own relation to it was one of the

first he had to make. He had never meant to go into it, and remained in that decision, though it was now doubly painful to do so. His ambition at college had been to become a man of letters, possibly a writer of history. Now he found himself in charge of the family property, which was far more considerable than he had ever supposed it to be; heir, too, to his father's many interests outside of his business, and in a position of responsibility in regard to his younger brother and sister. He was constantly occupied without having any real avocation; and this, to one of his temperament, was unhappiness. He still might have entered on a business career, having no distaste for it in itself, but he was thoroughly averse to making money needlessly.

His sister, who was herself busily occupied in hosts of good works, took note of his dejection, which, indeed, left its mark on his health. There was much respect, but no great sympathy, between the two. Mary had inherited all of her father's definiteness of belief and delight in action, and found it hard to fathom her brother's perplexities, but she at least understood that the loss of his father was wearing on him more rather than less as the months went by, and she unselfishly laid by her many projects and suggested a trip to Europe. She invited Mrs. Monroe, a connection of her father, who had often been a member of their household, to come again with her daughter Edith, and do for the younger children what she had often done for the older ones. When in Europe, Mary purposely left her brother free for independent traveling, mak-

ing herself long visits among her father's connections in Scotland. The trip had prolonged itself to a year and a half, and Robertson had returned richer in knowledge and health, gayer in spirits, but as yet not wholly clear as to his future occupations.

When the two friends had reached the cosy fire in Robertson's den, and had lighted, the one a pipe, the other a cigar, Seton uttered some maledictions against so-called musicales.

"You enjoyed yourself, I suppose," he went on. "It would be just like you. Do you take kindly to democracy again?"

"I do to the little I have discovered. I thought the evening pleasant. I am thankful to be off of that steamer."

"You did n't fancy the set, I imagine."

"Oh," said Robertson, in a deprecatory tone, "I have nothing against them. I 'm hungry for America just now, and they were not very American."

"Oh, yes, they were. You have come home with European ideas of America. Now just look for yourself, — money, and fashion, and cliques, that is the real thing."

"Why are you so bitter to-night, dear boy? You were very scathing at dinner."

"And you very eloquent. I do it to give you a chance. Miss Wilton gazed at you with tears of joy, and proceeded to ask Mitchell what you meant."

"I 've no doubt."

"Where is she to be, by the way?" continued Seton. "I saw you talking to her long enough to extract all her family history, if she has such a thing about her."

"Her plans are not fully settled. She thinks she may be with a Mrs. Kelway. I don't know who Mrs. Kelway is."

"Nobody does, I fancy."

"It is possible to remedy that."

"Creighton has had the brass to go to see her the first day. He and some other men did nothing but rave about her last night."

"I 'm sorry for that. I pity that child, Bob. She is really alone in the world, and yet does n't appear to know it."

"She knows more than you think she does. She knows that these men think her a beautiful woman. But she is n't, Arnold. I 'm a fair judge as to that. She has all the effect of being, but she is n't. Her forehead and eyes are noble, there is no doubt about that. She carries herself like a princess, and a certain light of purity from her eyes still enwraps her completely and makes it as impossible to criticise her as to libel the moon in the heavens. It 's nothing. It 's a trick, I suppose, a moulding of the eye. It is n't what it seems to be; it never is with women. To think of her receiving Creighton, only to have her name bandied about afterwards for the entire evening ! "

"I can't see that it is she who is to blame. I think that she will soon discover it, if any disrespect is intended. She does n't assume it beforehand, to be sure. She ought not to be alone, that 's the amount of it. She is too generous-minded."

"Did you call it generous to-night to treat an old steamer friend with less attention than any other man in the room? "

"I thought she treated Mitchell very fairly."

"Mitchell be ——! Mitchell! You know him. He 's a brute. She 's generous to all the brutes instead of to the gentlemen. You noticed it then. She talked to him the whole evening."

"Not quite that; but, as I say, she needs a little guidance."

"Mark my words, Arnold. She knows what she 's about. That wretch will inherit money, though just now he 's kept pretty short."

"On the steamer she snubbed him up and down. You told me so yourself."

"I suppose she has just found it out."

"You have the talent of self-torture, I must say. For my part, I respect Miss Wilton, though I don't pretend to do more."

"You are cutting, dear fellow. You have not the disadvantage of being mixed up in the inconsistencies of life. I do see a ray in my darkness, for she knows you are a perfect Crœsus, and she has never been more than polite. I know I am mean and suspicious. It 's my beggarly income forever flapping about my ears. It 's the last thing I ought to think of, but if others think of it" —

"She does not."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"I will try to see her as you do. Even where one has no personal interest, it is pleasant to believe that a woman of that age has no thoughts to conceal."

CHAPTER II.

MISS WILTON'S perplexities as to her future manner of life resolved themselves most pleasantly and speedily. As Mrs. Kelway was her only resource, she went to see her, though unwillingly, and returned in a jubilant state of mind.

"Everything is all right," she exclaimed, as Elsa answered her summons. "There is such a difference in people. Years could n't make Mrs. Garth understand me as Mrs. Kelway does in an instant. She is charming, Elsa, simply charming."

"I am so glad!" said Elsa, herself radiant.

"It is odd how few words are necessary between people who understand themselves and each other. I could tell her my position with perfect frankness, and without feeling like a beggar. She evidently has taken a fancy to me, and now can hardly wait to have me come. Her house is very fine and large, but not very well kept up. I remember now dining there once, when she was absent."

"Miss Kelway is at home?" asked Elsa.

"Yes, she keeps house, I believe. She is an odd-looking girl. It is easy to see that she has nothing of her mother's charmingly sympathetic and social nature;" and Lilla walked airily about the room, as if she had already expanded under Mrs. Kelway's genial influence.

Six weeks later Miss Wilton was fully established in her new home, and had greatly enlarged the circle of her acquaintance. The Lambert ball was over, which was a great relief, as her steamer friends who came to see her talked of it constantly and roused Mrs. Kelway's interest.

"I think they might have invited you, when so many of your friends are going," she said. "'Live and let live,' is what I say."

Lilla laughed, and said that the Lamberts did not seem to be infringing on that simple rule.

Much of the gayety of her life now came to her through Mrs. Kelway, who took pains to introduce her widely, and was herself not averse to renewing her youth even to the point of occasional waltzes. At one house to which Mrs. Kelway took her, she met a son of Mrs. Garth, her uncle's widow, and she disliked him extremely. He nevertheless claimed a cousin's privilege and came to see her. He added to this offense by bringing with him without authority a Mr. Gardiner, whom she had simply met at the same house. Miss Wilton was thoroughly angry and sat stiffly silent, while Mrs. Kelway supplied all deficiencies.

The stranger, if the term can distinguish him from Richard Garth, was a man to attract attention. He was of middle height and strongly built. His head was held powerfully erect, and his hair lay thinly over his well-shaped forehead. His lips were overhung with a heavy, dark mustache, and his pleasant brown eyes were very observant. He did not attempt to soften Lilla's displeasure, but talked chiefly

with Mrs. Kelway, who, before he left, with her usual frankness, asked him about his occupations. He replied that he was connected with a Western railroad owned chiefly in New York.

"Railroads!" exclaimed Mrs. Kelway. "I never saw any money in railroads, except what one puts in to begin with, and one is lucky to see that."

"His railroad is not of that kind," said Garth, in a low voice to Lilla. Both men had risen to take their leave. "He is the mainstay of the whole matter, and a mighty successful man. I can't say I know him well, but he heard I was your cousin and so asked to be presented the other evening, and was glad enough to be brought with me to-night."

Lilla made no answer. As Mr. Garth seemed to be a friend of Mrs. Kelway, she did not feel at liberty to show her resentment further than by her icy silence.

The next evening Seton's card was brought up. Mrs. Kelway had gone up to her room, and did not at once appear. It was not Seton's first visit, and they had met very recently at a reception, which they were glad to talk over. Seton spoke of their hostess, Mrs. Meredith.

"She 's a great friend of Robertson's," he said, "which is rather odd, as he is not very fond of society, and she is devoted to it."

"I know he admires Mrs. Gordon very much, — her sister."

"Yes; she is quite an old lady, is she not? Mrs. Meredith seems still young."

"She is very kind to take me on faith."

"Did you know of their good fortune? Mr. Meredith has just fallen heir to the property of a cousin. They are very hospitable people, and appreciate money on that account. Now they can do as they like, I imagine."

"The ball is a sample, I suppose, of what they like. I like it, too."

"Yes, we may all congratulate ourselves when the Merediths are in luck. You saw Miss Goldthwait, did you not, — Mrs. Meredith's sister?"

"Of course. She was said to be the most beautiful woman in the room."

"She was not," said Seton, with the calmness of an authority on such points. "She is always very effective in a ball-room. She dresses in the best taste of the fashionable order of taste, but she was not, by a great deal, the most beautiful woman there. Miss Monroe was not, but she comes nearer to it. Miss Monroe has fine eyes and a most lovely complexion, — dark, soft eyes, the most beautiful I have ever seen, I think."

"You mean Mr. Robertson's cousin, I suppose. I did not know she was there. I am so sorry I did not see her. One hears rumors that she is engaged to Mr. Robertson."

To Lilla's surprise, Seton hesitated before replying.

"No," he said at last, "she is not."

There was a moment of awkward silence, for Seton's manner did not carry conviction.

"Really, Miss Wilton," he added, with a slight flush, "I have no reason to suppose them engaged,

and I should have said so in a less equivocal fashion. One hears it rumored constantly; I suppose because he pays so few visits, and when he goes out is always with her, as you must have noticed the other evening."

As Lilla had been honored with one of these visits said to be so rare, and had had a long talk with Robertson at the Merediths' reception, she was convinced that Seton was overstating this matter. He appeared to wish his friend engaged, or at least to wish her to think so.

"By the way," continued Seton, "I hear from Robertson that the Merediths are getting up some theatricals, and that Miss Goldthwait is anxious to resign her rôle in your favor."

"She has said so, but I am such a complete novice! — that is, I have acted perhaps three times in my life."

"For an amateur, that is a large experience. Do join in, Miss Wilton. Miss Goldthwait is really honest in begging off. She has not sufficient composure — *aplomb* — for an actress, and no one else in their club quite looks the part. I have a premonition that you are exactly adapted to the amateur stage and will shine especially as a beautiful California heiress. The play is American, written for the Merediths; it 's said to be very clever."

"Why not ask Miss Monroe?"

"She is not the right one."

"Not with the most beautiful eyes you ever saw?"

Seton laughed as he caught her innocent, inquiring look, and replied gayly: —

"It is not polite to prove me in the wrong."

"Excuse my delay, Lilla," said Mrs. Kelway, tripping in; "and this is your friend, Mr. Seton. The first time we have met, I think, Mr. Seton."

She gave him her hand.

"May I join your little circle? Thanks, I prefer the higher chair. Now," she went on, a little disconcerted by Seton's silence, "don't let me disturb you."

Seton, nevertheless, appeared much disturbed and without words till Lilla said, "Tell us about the opera. You like Wagner, I believe."

"It 's magnificent," said Seton. "You must certainly go, and many times."

"I 'm so old-fashioned as to miss the tunes," said Lilla. "I suppose there are none in the Valkyre."

"Ah, it 's so much more wonderful. A tune! — the word condemns itself. A jog-trot of sixteen measures, with an ending as inevitable as the rhymes of a sonnet! This is life itself, swaying, unrestful; rhythmic, indeed, and harmonious as the movements of the wind, but equally uncontrolled."

"How true that is!" murmured Mrs. Kelway.

Seton started.

"But don't you think," continued Mrs. Kelway, "that it would be better to take your music and your acting separately? It is n't natural, after all."

She waited for her answer, and Seton said rather desperately: —

"Many prefer it."

Lilla introduced another subject, but Seton soon rose to take his leave. Mrs. Kelway rose also.

"Good evening," she said very cordially. "I am always pleased to see Miss Wilton's friends; they 're sure to be of the right sort. Just at present I am not entertaining very much, but in this quiet way we shall always be glad to see you."

"Thank you," said Seton. He turned to Lilla with a look of comical distress, and then, as she did not respond to it, added soberly: —

"Shall you be at the Morrises' next week?"

"I hope so."

"And may I have the pleasure of dancing the German with you?"

Lilla assented, and Mrs. Kelway asked, following Seton to the stairs: —

"What Morris is that?"

"Robert M. Morris."

"Morris & Talbot, hardware dealers?"

"I believe not," said Seton.

"Robert M. — Robert M. Oh, I know. That 's the man the custom-house has been mulcting in a considerable sum. No, that was Wainwright, Robert M. Wainwright."

"John B.," suggested Seton.

"Was it? Well, perhaps it was. Do you know the way down? Good-night, then. *Good*-night."

"Do you like him?" said Lilla, when the front door had been shut. She had taken a large photograph-book into her lap, and had sunk back into her chair.

"Very much, but is n't he timid?"

"Timid?"

"Yes; and if you will allow me to say so, you

ought to help him out a little. You are slightly cold in your manner. I noticed it with Mr. Gardiner, only he is better able to take care of himself. At first, I thought Mr. Seton a little reserved, — just a trifle, you know; but I see now it 's nothing in the world but timidity. Well, it 's pleasant having you here, Lilla. Laura 's so queer that we are not gay by ourselves. Do you know, it just occurred to me as Mr. Seton left that I could perfectly well give a party for you. At least I can give the house, if you will help out about the expense. Then we 'll give that Mr. Seton a really good time. He does n't look as though he often had one."

The evening set for the Morrises' reception proved very rainy. At the Robertsons' house a family party sat down to whist immediately after dinner. Mrs. Monroe usually went early to her room, having more or less the habits of an invalid, but this evening her brother from Philadelphia was with them, and she stayed for a rubber, her daughter Edith, who had given up the reception on account of the weather, and Minnie Robertson making up the table. Arnold Robertson had made ready to go out, but now had apparently given up his intention, for he paced quietly up and down from the drawing-room where the game was proceeding to the library in the rear of the house, pausing occasionally to look at Edith as she sat absorbed in her hand. Some special significance lurked to-night in the dark eyes Seton had praised, and a warm, clear color underlay her delicate skin. She did not look at him, but, as he drew near, held up her cards.

"Just look at this hand," she said; and added as he bent over her, "Aren't you a little restless to-night?"

"Don't talk, Edith, I beg of you," said Mrs. Monroe. "You have just trumped my trick."

"It is the fault of the cards, mother. There, you see how it is going. That gives Uncle Burton three. Don't be discouraged," she added to Arnold. "I'll sing to you presently."

"Presently won't do, if I go to the Morrises'."

"But you were not going."

"I half promised that I would."

"Promised whom?"

"A very lovely woman whom I saw at the Meredithes'."

"I did not see you talking to any lovely woman."

"It was when you were not looking, of course."

"Arnold, please," said Mrs. Monroe mildly. "It's Edith's lead. We must get the odd, or we are lost."

"We are lost, then," said Edith, a few moments later. "They have the whole thing in their hands. Will you try one more game?"

"No," said Mrs. Monroe, rising.

"I'm awfully sorry," said her brother, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Oh, it was not in the least your fault, John. No, Edith, you needn't come up. With the cane I do very well."

"Oh, yes, mother, to the top of the stairs."

When Edith came down, she found Robertson alone in the drawing-room. She stopped in the doorway with some timidity.

"You have n't gone out yet?"

"You were to sing to me first."

"Oh, what nonsense! Miss — Blank would have done it for you."

"Miss Wilton says she has no accomplishments."

Edith walked to the piano, too much disturbed to speak. She knew now who it was, as Miss Wilton had been pointed out to her. What could be said if a man could not see for himself the utter difference between such women and — Men must, indeed, be made in a coarse mould, the best of them. Impatiently she tossed over her music, seeing readily enough Miss Wilton's strong points. She was handsome. She had fine manners, even. Undoubtedly she talked well. Yet she was simply, and to a woman obviously, odious.

"But she has one very delightful accomplishment," said Arnold, continuing his own line of thought. "She can talk. Or rather, it is the combination of talking and listening, an indescribable something, which one does not so much notice in her as miss in others afterwards. I have asked Minnie to call on her. She was a fellow-passenger of ours, you know. So you will probably be able to judge for yourself."

"Arnold!" burst out Edith in despair. "What do you know about her anyway? Who is she?"

Robertson's face grew dark, and Edith's heart sank at the change, but she went on in no conciliatory mood.

"She seems to have plenty of friends, but really, in these days, one is forced to judge for one 's self."

"You must do so," said Arnold abruptly. There

was no sympathy in his voice. Edith's hand trembled as she turned over her music.

"I don't think I will sing to you to-night," she said, at last. "I am not in voice. I will practice on the piano."

"Play me something."

Edith played an air from Liszt, and then looked covertly around at him. He seemed to have given up the idea of going out.

"Is your flute here?" she asked.

"Will you play with me?" returned Arnold eagerly. "I thought you hated it."

"I am becoming hardened."

Robertson went for his flute with all the pleasure of a beginner whose efforts are not always tolerated, and they fell industriously to work, she following the harder passages with her voice, to correct his mistakes.

The evening passed rapidly. Edith looked up in surprise as the clock struck eleven. Minnie and her uncle must already have left the library, for she had heard footsteps going upstairs. She pushed back her stool and walked towards the fireplace.

"It is late, Arnold. You had better close the piano."

When he approached her she said softly:—

"I am sorry I hurt your feelings."

"Hardly my feelings; they are not involved."

"You can't think it wrong to hold aloof at times from making new acquaintances. As to Miss Wilton, I may be right or wrong. Of course, I know next to nothing. But it does make such a difference

whom one knows. One really creates the world one lives in."

"That," said Arnold, "is a responsibility I do not myself like to take, until the present creation is a more assured failure."

Miss Monroe made no answer to this. She had found it best to be patiently silent when Arnold began to talk at random. She made some light, irrelevant remark, rising as if to go, but Arnold, still standing where he had been, said with much bitterness: —

"The unfortunate thing is that people have a tendency to become what they are thought to be, — either good or bad. They say even a nettle will not sting, if you pick it fearlessly. But why do you go, Edith? Eleven o'clock is surely not late. I will put a stick on the fire and light a cigarette, if you will stay and talk to me. Ah, that 's right. It is n't often we have had such a cosy, homespun evening since you launched yourself on the gay world."

"It is rather nice. I wonder why it 's necessary in society to say so many things one does n't mean, or at least does n't much care about."

"I understand it in my own case," said Arnold. "In society one's first duty is to be agreeable, and very few people can be wholly themselves and yet be that. Here at home I can be" — Arnold gazed high and low for the proper adjective, as he lit his cigarette — "Calvinistic, if I like."

"And do you like?"

Arnold smiled as their eyes met.

"How pleased my father would have been to hear me say that! Do you suppose, Edith, that if father were alive he would find a single thing to approve of in me?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"But which of his ideals do I in any way realize? I am a business man only in the sense of taking care of what he saved, and a religious man somewhat in the same way; I try to hold on to what he has left to me. His Scotch Presbyterian church, where he was a mighty pillar, has known me chiefly by my name on its subscription lists. I don't marry at twenty-five, I don't think Scotland the model nation of the world, and I waste my time at balls and theatres."

"I have thought of that last point," said Edith quietly. "Your evenings ought to be very valuable to you."

"For what purpose?" said Arnold, much surprised.

"For literary work. You know best in what direction. You said once you wished to write history."

Arnold was silent for some moments.

"I fear I have changed," he said at last. "I don't think of such things any more."

He did not go on to say what he did think of, and Edith watched him rather anxiously. At last he continued, more to himself than to her.

"At times I nearly decide to identify myself fully with my father's church, or some other of greater poverty and simplicity."

Edith was surprised but interested. She herself

had no great predilection for one church above another. Minnie, however, had become a strong High-Church Episcopalian, and she herself shared a certain reactionary sentiment towards the evangelicalism of the religious training common to them all.

"If you feel that you can," she said, "I am very glad. Perhaps, however, you can find a clergyman you can support more heartily than this Dr. Newton."

"Undoubtedly," replied Arnold somewhat bitterly; "undoubtedly I can find a liberal-minded clergyman who would not jar on my delicate feelings. But sermons are foolishness, and so are services, and all that a man adds to himself to become a churchman of any church. But I do want to be openly a follower of Christ, if I may be, and to remember his death as he ordained; I want to be confronted periodically with my own conscience, to have the words of Scripture sounded in my ears, and to have a voice to speak with to those in the depths of sin or suffering. These things can come to one through a church of bare walls, brief ritual, ignorant preaching, and narrow-minded congregation, and in such a place the chance of self-deception is lessened. If I still find pleasure there, it may possibly be that of holiness."

"You can find the bareness and the ignorance, I am sure."

Arnold smiled in a discouraged way.

"The vessel is earthen in every case. If one could but be rid of it! But even Christ had to work through his followers."

"I like to hear all this, you know, Arnold," said

Edith after a pause. "I like to know what you believe, and I am very glad. But I began by asking what you thought of doing for an occupation."

"I must know what I believe first, must n't I, Edith? I can't answer your question at all yet. I only know that to me America and the nineteenth century are opportunities, not to chronicle, but to do something."

This evening which passed so quietly at the Robertsons' brought more excitement to Miss Wilton. Mrs. Morris had sent cards to Mrs. and Miss Kelway as well as to her; and Lilla, who was beginning to have some curiosity as to the moody and unsociable daughter of the house, took her invitation to her in person. Laura was leaning on the window-sill of her bedchamber, looking into the back garden. There was nothing in the room to suggest occupation, nor could Lilla see any object of interest outside.

"I have brought you an invitation," she said. "I wish you would go with us."

Laura read the card and laid it down silently.

"Is n't there a slight hope that you will?"

"Not the very slightest."

"But you know you will become one-sided if you don't see people. You don't see any of your mother's visitors; no one, excuse me, but provision-dealers and such people; and I presume, of course, some friends of your own. One comes to have a bitter feeling towards a society one sees nothing of."

"You are very kind to imagine me still innocent of that feeling."

Lilla shook her head impatiently. She was surprised that she felt interested to argue with such misanthrophy.

At this point Mrs. Kelway came in.

"I am trying," said Lilla, "to make Laura look favorably on Mrs. Morris's invitation."

"How is it, Laura? Will you go?" said Mrs. Kelway, walking to the bureau with some bills she had brought, and pausing before the mirror to pat the crinkles on her forehead. "Can't even Lilla decoy you out of your shell?"

Laura looked up almost fiercely.

"I thought, mother, we were not to argue these matters any more. You know that I will not go, and you know why, too."

"Well, well, my dear," said Mrs. Kelway, deprecatingly, "I thought, perhaps, with such nice people"—

"I don't care to meet nice people."

Mrs. Kelway turned towards Lilla with a theatrical gesture.

"Why it should be my lot to have a daughter who does n't care for nice people, I never made out;—I, who live on nothing else. Mr. Kelway, too; however unsympathetic he is on some points, he always knows nice people. I will say that for him."

Lilla disliked this altercation intensely and turned to leave, but Mrs. Kelway anticipated her and went out herself; Lilla followed, desiring no explanation of the hidden differences between mother and daughter.

As Miss Wilton stood ready to go to the reception, wearing some beautiful pink roses sent by Seton, another remembrance came, which caused her to laugh outright. It was a bunch of pansies and lilies-of-the-valley from a young man named Taylor. Lilla had known his older brother and sister extremely well in her school-girl days, when this young gentleman was a curly-headed urchin. It was with the greatest difficulty that she refrained from calling him Freddie, still.

"What is the matter?" asked Mrs. Kelway, hearing her exclamation.

"The way I 've been passed down in the Taylor family is a caution," said Lilla, explaining the situation. "Now I 'm within one of the baby."

"I wish *I* knew some one to speak to," sighed Mrs. Kelway; "some one, that is, with more *savoir faire* than young Seton. If only we were to meet Mr. Garth or Mr. Gardiner!"

"Then Heaven grant it may be Mr. Gardiner. He at least has the manners of a gentleman."

Mrs. Kelway raised her eyebrows at this favorable opinion, which Lilla had formed while showing every external mark of displeasure.

The house was already alive with guests when they arrived, and the music and gay dresses, together with Mrs. Morris's gracious reception, sent a sudden fire into Lilla's young blood. As if in confirmation of the old proverb, Gardiner, of whom they had been speaking, met them as they left Mrs. Morris. Lilla started in surprise.

"Is Mr. Garth here too?" she inquired.

"No, he is not," said Gardiner with a laugh in his brown eyes. "I worked hard to secure my invitation, and I have come unprotected by Mr. Garth. Now I hope I am early enough to secure you for the German."

"That was promised a week ago," said Lilla. "Do you wish to see my card?"

"No," said Gardiner with a gesture of discouragement. "Let us have a waltz without looking."

After this Lilla was so constantly on the floor that she had but little chance to look about the room; still, she satisfied herself that Robertson had not yet arrived, and she secretly reserved for him one of the later dances of the evening. She could not but be flattered as she noticed that Gardiner never danced or spoke with any woman but herself. He sometimes stood quietly by the door for a half hour together and then would be wholly invisible, but she felt sure he kept watch of all she did.

Before the German began, Freddie Taylor took her into an adjoining room for a little rest and refreshment.

"This is very nice," she said, really almost dizzy with dancing; "and, Mr. Taylor, do indulge me with a little wisdom. To-night I have heard so much foolishness."

"A little of that foolishness repeated might make me a great deal the wiser," said Freddie.

To this Miss Wilton found nothing better to say than, "What lovely palms these are!" but she inwardly marveled over his precocious intellect.

Seton came at last and took her to her place in the

German. She looked about the room, and still saw nothing of Robertson.

"It is just as well," she thought. "This is nothing but a rush and a glitter. A good dancer is all that is needed when one can scarcely get out a connected sentence. Only he said he would be here."

Seton meanwhile was delivering himself of several very well-connected sentences. He was in high spirits and full of anecdotes.

"This is our turn," he said at last, and as they were dancing together, he dropped into the more significant quality of voice which she was beginning to recognize, and said: —

"Would it be allowed to pay a direct compliment to your dress this evening?"

"No, I fear it would n't. I don't like compliments to my dress or my dressmaker."

"But that takes away the only resource of cowards like myself."

"So much the better," said Lilla, smiling.

"Then," said Seton defiantly, as they separated for a figure of the German, "if you forbid subterfuges, you must promise to like the truth."

"I always like the truth," replied Lilla cheerfully.

Later Seton remarked in a quiet interval: —

"I thought you said Mr. Robertson was to be here to-night."

"I did."

"Where is he?"

"To-night is n't over," said Lilla belligerently.

"What will you wager that he will come?"

"Nothing. It is n't a subject for wagers."

"Too serious?"

"Of course, far too serious."

"Well," said Seton, "I will wager a pound of your favorite confectionery that he won't. For why? Miss Monroe is n't here. Mrs. Meredith is n't here."

"Agreed," said Lilla, giving no heed to the evident attempt to provoke her. "Please go to the right place for the confectionery. I will give you the address."

There was a little conservatory opening out of the supper-room, and thither Lilla asked to be taken during an interlude in the German. Miss Goldthwait came also, and the two were soon surrounded by a group of men; some of them such as are often to be found at a large ball, who care nothing and do nothing for the success or pleasantness of the festivity to which they are invited, but are willing to be lazily amused, if at no great distance from the refreshment tables. Gardiner had at first been with them, but had now disappeared. Jests and repartees, not particularly good, but sufficient for the occasion, were flying thick and fast, when Lilla suddenly leaned forward, those in front of her giving way, and held out her hand.

"Good-evening, Mr. Robertson. You are close on midnight."

It was indeed Arnold who came forward to meet her.

"Mrs. Morris tells me," he said, "that it is n't late, but on the contrary just beginning to be early. May I have the pleasure?"

Lilla took his offered arm, and they went for a promenade into the more deserted dancing-hall.

It was after Edith had left him that Robertson had decided to go even at that late hour to the Morrises' reception. He wanted a little music, a little dancing, and he was sure to meet acquaintances. Soon after his arrival he saw Miss Wilton surrounded by men, and this for no special reason aroused his ire. He at once went to her, and having her under his protection, with her hand as a gentle weight on his arm, he was mollified, and forgot his discontent. She was looking unusually well, he thought.

As the music began, he stopped walking.

"I want a dance now," he said, "before any one comes."

"Is n't 'we' the proper style for emperors and dictators?" asked Lilla. "For instance, 'we will grace you with a waltz.'"

"*We* wish to dance, then. That is better, if true."

"I thought you said you had no accomplishments," said Arnold after their waltz, his face flushed with exercise and pleasure.

"Well, I can waltz," said Lilla, "and cook. Are those accomplishments?"

"The best. I should like to keep straight on, but I suppose you have already danced most of the evening."

"I am afraid I must ask you to take me to Mr. Seton. This is still the German, and I see him waiting."

As they began to cross the hall, they were stopped by a young naval officer, who came to announce that there would be a Virginia reel after the German, and to ask Miss Wilton to dance with him.

She glanced at Robertson.

"It is already promised," she said.

The officer expressed his regret, and as he passed on Robertson said, with a fine bitterness: —

"One must bring into society the foresight and sagacity of the stock-market, if one expects any chance. How do you women like being allotted about in order of application, with no possibility of conferring a favor where you may wish?"

"I don't admit the accusation."

"Why, supposing you had not been engaged for this reel, and this young fellow had cut in and asked you before I knew anything of it, and supposing, for purposes of argument, that you would have preferred to dance it with me," —

"I should have answered as I did," said Lilla, taking her seat by her partner.

Arnold started, and stood staring after her till she turned just sufficiently to meet his eyes with a smile that made his heart leap.

"Well, old man," was Seton's brief salutation. "The circus is just out, I take it."

"Just begun," said Arnold, his face radiant. "I play the clown to-night."

"Hm!" said Seton, somewhat in the dark, "not a bad part, for the clown always wins, not by good running, but by trick or favor. But I believe we are wanted on the floor."

Edith after a pause. "I like to know what you believe, and I am very glad. But I began by asking what you thought of doing for an occupation."

"I must know what I believe first, must n't I, Edith? I can't answer your question at all yet. I only know that to me America and the nineteenth century are opportunities, not to chronicle, but to do something."

This evening which passed so quietly at the Robertsons' brought more excitement to Miss Wilton. Mrs. Morris had sent cards to Mrs. and Miss Kelway as well as to her; and Lilla, who was beginning to have some curiosity as to the moody and unsociable daughter of the house, took her invitation to her in person. Laura was leaning on the window-sill of her bedchamber, looking into the back garden. There was nothing in the room to suggest occupation, nor could Lilla see any object of interest outside.

"I have brought you an invitation," she said. "I wish you would go with us."

Laura read the card and laid it down silently.

"Is n't there a slight hope that you will?"

"Not the very slightest."

"But you know you will become one-sided if you don't see people. You don't see any of your mother's visitors; no one, excuse me, but provision-dealers and such people; and I presume, of course, some friends of your own. One comes to have a bitter feeling towards a society one sees nothing of."

"You are very kind to imagine me still innocent of that feeling."

Lilla shook her head impatiently. She was surprised that she felt interested to argue with such misanthrophy.

At this point Mrs. Kelway came in.

"I am trying," said Lilla, "to make Laura look favorably on Mrs. Morris's invitation."

"How is it, Laura? Will you go?" said Mrs. Kelway, walking to the bureau with some bills she had brought, and pausing before the mirror to pat the crinkles on her forehead. "Can't even Lilla decoy you out of your shell?"

Laura looked up almost fiercely.

"I thought, mother, we were not to argue these matters any more. You know that I will not go, and you know why, too."

"Well, well, my dear," said Mrs. Kelway, deprecatingly, "I thought, perhaps, with such nice people"—

"I don't care to meet nice people."

Mrs. Kelway turned towards Lilla with a theatrical gesture.

"Why it should be my lot to have a daughter who does n't care for nice people, I never made out;—I, who live on nothing else. Mr. Kelway, too; however unsympathetic he is on some points, he always knows nice people. I will say that for him."

Lilla disliked this altercation intensely and turned to leave, but Mrs. Kelway anticipated her and went out herself; Lilla followed, desiring no explanation of the hidden differences between mother and daughter.

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"Ah!" said Laura attentively. "I thought that would come soon."

Miss Wilton looked keenly at the speaker, and Laura met the gaze with unusual directness.

"Perhaps," suggested Lilla, "you have yourself thought of living some other life."

"I used to think of it."

"You have become happier, then, of late."

"Perfectly miserable," was the unmoved reply.

"That is scarcely natural after so many years."

"What do you mean? What has my mother been telling you?"

"Not much. I know you have had a bitter sorrow."

"Do you care to know about it?"

"It would be of little use, I think," said Lilla frankly.

"Tell me what my mother said," cried Laura with a touch of fierceness.

Lilla paused a moment and replied: —

"That you were engaged to be married, that she approved of the match, that you willfully broke it off and have repented of it ever since."

"Then I think you must hear my version. I can't make it as brief as that, but I will not make it long. I was eighteen, and even younger and more foolish than the age suggests. I was passionately in love, or thought so, which is much the same. George — that was his name — did not love me; I see that now: — so my mother and I together entrapped him. I know of no better word for it. Well, we were engaged, and later he had to go away for a couple

of months. It was just after Mr. Miller's death. You remember Mrs. Miller, to whose boarding-house I took you the other day?"

"Yes; I think you said she is a relative of yours."

"Yes, distant," said Laura, with an odd look at her visitor. "I love her like a"—Laura hesitated at the word "mother"—"as if she were my aunt. She was left a widow and poor. I was with her then a great deal, and from her love and memories learned what my love and hopes might be. George was all and more, I thought, than her husband ever was. All the worthlessness had been in me, I who had been willing to hold him by his weakest, least noble impulses. I began to understand his moments of rebellion against such influences, to understand and to love him the better. I could change, and I would. George came back, as to his fetters. Then followed a warfare between my mother and myself. It was really that, though our ends were apparently the same. But they were not the same. I worked heart and soul to win his respect. There was no other woman between us; I mean no one whom he cared for. My mother was between us. She held him to his engagement, she repeated all her devices, she made it impossible for him to respect me or for me to respect myself, so at last I sent him away, and I am glad to say he is happily married.

"Well, that is my version. Mother will miss you sadly, and so shall I. Two is a horrible number. But you might as well go sooner as later, and for slight grounds rather than serious ones."

"Your mother is so unselfish and kindly," said

Lilla, oppressed by these accusations, "that some happier life between you seems possible. To me she has been extraordinarily kind. I should like to say it to you, though I may not be able to, to her. Has n't Mrs. Miller any advice to offer to you? Or your father, has he nothing to say?"

Laura answered with a touch of sarcasm: —

"Mrs. Miller is a saint, my one comfort on earth, but even she does n't take the ground that my mother is unselfish. As for my father, he does n't encourage my going out to him. He has lived alone too long now to want a family. I imagine, too, he is not prospering. He sacrificed a great deal to leave us this house and money with which to live. Mrs. Miller always stands up for my father, but she does not advise me to go him. And besides, I 'm one in the house here. My mother would go crazy all alone."

Lilla betook herself to her room and sat there reading. Mrs. Kelway had been out at lunch-time. Now she was probably at home, as it was drawing near the dinner-hour. Lilla did not wish to meet her first at table, and yet it seemed hard to go to her room for the purpose of attacking her. At last, however, she decided to do so. She went to her door, knocked, and entered.

"Good-morning," said Mrs. Kelway, or " good-afternoon, rather."

"Good-morning," said Lilla.

Mrs. Kelway was bending over her bureau, sorting her handkerchiefs. She was dressed for dinner in a dark blue silk with black lace over the shoulders.

Her light hair lay on her forehead in its usual multiplicity of fine ringlets. She seemed really afraid of Lilla, for, though she affected to go on with her selection, she now made no progress.

Lilla did not wait long. She walked to the window, turned back, and said: —

"It is better for us to understand each other, is n't it? I cannot longer pretend not to care when you place me in such an embarrassing position as you did last night. I am still too young to allow myself to be compromised. Some men I could scarcely look in the face again after such hints had been dropped. So I have come straight to you, Mrs. Kelway, to say this frankly and see if there is any explanation or a hope of a better understanding."

Lilla stopped, and waited for her answer.

"Have you quite finished, do you think?" inquired Mrs. Kelway.

Lilla inclined her head very slightly.

"And what did you say you wanted?" pursued Mrs. Kelway, evidently wishing to gain time, though her tone was defiant.

"An explanation," repeated Lilla quietly.

"That is just what I myself have tried all night to discover. An explanation is what I wanted, too, and I think I 've found it. The only one, at least, that I can offer is that Heaven having sent Mr. Gardiner, according to your petition of the day before, and Heaven not sending away Mrs. Kelway, as you omitted to ask, you were obliged to catch at the first unreasonable, gratuitous quarrel you could pick to

accomplish that end yourself. It 's all very well to talk about not being able to look him in the face again, when you did nothing else for an hour afterwards. I have never wished to be in your way, Lilla. I have told you often that I would willingly leave at the slightest private intimation from you, but I must say I did n't expect an open insult; neither did I suppose that, after you had in this way got rid of my company, *I* should be the one to be called to account for placing *you* in an embarrassing position."

Mrs. Kelway felt that she had made a strong point, and with this sense of relief came the wish not to quarrel with Lilla. She leaned her head to the left in her characteristic way, and said with a conciliatory smile: —

"Confess, Lilla, that you are a trifle unfair."

Miss Wilton took up the word again with no sign of relenting.

"I have found out that we are very different. I don't suppose it 's of any use to assure you that I had not the remotest intention of making you leave the room last night. We look at things differently. I do not consider society as a means to simply personal ends. When we have totally opposite views of life, you cannot possibly see how unbearable your allusions and implications sometimes are to me."

"How thankful I must be, then," retorted Mrs. Kelway, "that you have so far controlled your contempt for me as to live at my house!"

"That must not, indeed, continue," said Lilla with sudden color. "My feelings have been chang-

ing daily. I have tried to make some other arrangement, and can complete it no doubt for January first."

"Then you think you have sufficient forbearance to put up with my hospitality for half a month more."

"Mrs. Kelway," said Lilla, in some excitement, "this is the first time that you have spoken in this way. Till now I have always supposed myself welcome. Of course, my paying for the actual expenses of my board does not entitle me to a hospitality which you do not care to offer. Tell me what your wishes are, and I will conform to them."

There was a short pause, then Mrs. Kelway said in a slightly unsteady voice: —

"I am very fond of you, Lilla. I want you to confess that you have been using rather strong language, and then I will try not to interfere with your way of managing your friends, which is successful enough, and we will live together peaceably, for I can't get along without you, dear."

There was silence again, till Mrs. Kelway added:

"Did you say you had looked at some rooms?"

"Yes."

"But not engaged any?"

"I have a week's refusal of them."

"You will let that pass, of course."

"No," said Lilla in a softer voice, "I can't do that, Mrs. Kelway. You are very kind and generous to say what you have just said, but I am none the less certain that I must leave you. We should have this same thing over again. We are not alike."

"Ah!" breathed Mrs. Kelway through her teeth, "we are not alike, indeed. I am unfortunate enough to carry a soft heart about with me. Do as you like, then, but I admire your reverence for the calendar. Your feelings, you say, have been changing daily; just sufficiently, I suppose, to bring out right on the first of January. Or is it from kindness to me that you will put up a fortnight longer with my 'unbearable allusions and implications'?"

"I think," said Lilla, much embarrassed, "that we had better put an end to the discussion for to-night. You are speaking under great excitement."

Mrs. Kelway gave a short and derisive laugh.

"We 'll defer it, of course, as long as your affection prompts you to stay. I forgot it was n't quite out."

"I can leave to-night," said Lilla haughtily.

"Undoubtedly. You *could* have done so any day. Perhaps you think a fortnight's notice is only fair, though you came to me on considerably less. On that point, I 'm not particular."

Miss Wilton had waited impatiently for the end of this speech, but when it came, her intended reply left her, and she turned proudly to the door. Mrs. Kelway began on another tirade, but Lilla, passing out, closed the door gently behind her and went upstairs. She looked at her watch; it was half-past five.

"Elsa," she said softly, "come here. I must leave this place. How long will it take you to pack everything?"

"How long?" repeated Elsa with a helpless stare. "An hour and a half or two hours."

"Then do it at once. I will send a carriage for you and the trunks. I am going now to speak to Miss Kelway. Don't be grieved. I 'm all right for once."

"I don't doubt Mademoiselle is right," said Elsa loyally. Could we go for the night to Mrs. Miller's?"

"Has she room?"

"It says so in the window."

"I will speak to Miss Kelway."

Laura tried in vain to dissuade Miss Wilton from this hasty departure, but finding it useless she favored Elsa's suggestion as better than going to a hotel, and at last offered to go herself to Mrs. Miller and arrange for the change. This Lilla thought unnecessary, but Laura insisted, and in a few moments was out of the house.

It was a busy time, as Mrs. Miller was in the kitchen engaged in serving the dinner. Laura entered, as one accustomed to the situation, and bestowed herself a little out of the way of the preparations, while she quietly let Mrs. Miller know her errand. The latter looked displeased.

"You have told her, then?" she said.

"No, I assure you," said Laura. "She asked me this morning if I were not related to you, and I ventured to say I was; for you know there is a connection between her family and ours, and so through her mother I may be said to be related to you."

"And you think your mother has not told her of the cousinship?"

"I am sure she has n't. You know mother does

not mention you at all, even to me; and I know she would not to Lilla."

"Oh, very well. I 'm glad to let my room, as far as that goes, and to be of service to her, too, as long as she knows nothing. My husband always told me to keep clear of Mr. Wilton, and she is her father over again."

"And the maid, Elsa?"

"Oh, yes, I can look after her."

Thus Laura returned with a favorable answer, and the transfer was immediately effected. It was not a happy evening at the Kelways'. At dinner no mention was made of Lilla's departure, and after dinner Mrs. Kelway betook herself at once to her room.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. MILLER'S boarding-house had its comforts as well as its oddities. The oldest boarders were always its firmest friends, and the newest admitted that it had a homelike air. The little reception-room on the ground floor was, perhaps, its most trying feature. Its cheerlessness was a standing puzzle to Mrs. Miller after a radiator had failed to lend it any glow, and the boarders were in the habit, from time to time, of offering suggestions for its improvement. Mr. Willcox, an inmate of long standing, thought that the introduction of a dentist's chair and apparatus might slightly temper its gloom. The remainder of that floor was occupied by Mrs. Miller and her three children; the kitchen, pantry, and so forth, were in the L.

The back room upstairs was a very pleasant parlor, having high, yellow wainscoting, a good-sized fireplace, and very comfortable chairs. The wall-paper was pretty, not having been selected, fortunately, by Mrs. Miller in person. The sun lay pleasantly here as well as in the L dining-room, which was connected with it by an old-fashioned curved passage. This room, though narrow for its length, was also cheery with sunlight, and was the joy of Mrs. Miller's heart. Here her successful though peculiar cooking revived the human spirit

three times a day, and laid the foundation of her pecuniary welfare. Well might its walls be decorated with the plumage of bright-colored birds, which the late Mr. Miller had shot in the South; pleasant were the engravings of deer and duck; and cheerfully twittered the canary-bird, whose cage was occasionally hung in its window. If the vines would but grow faster in the small garden below, and the locust would grow at all, these windows would be still pleasanter.

The front room on this floor was the old-time habitation of Mr. and Mrs. Thomson, and the little room over the front door was Mrs. Miller's office. Above this the building ran up three stories, but the acquaintance of its inhabitants can best be made in the dining-room, where they had already gathered, when Miss Wilton was ushered in. Lilla had had some idea of not presenting herself at dinner; on the morrow she could have Elsa bring coffee to her room, and by lunching down town, could avoid the general table; but to-night she saw no reasonable way out of it, and, with an inward protest against the vulgarity of dining in a familiar way with people who were there simply because they chose to be, she was taken to the dining-room by Mrs. Miller and introduced to her immediate neighbors.

Mrs. Miller's household would not have run smoothly, had she exercised no discretion in the admission of her boarders, but her principle of selection had apparently little reference to table-manners, which, beginning with well-nigh perfection in the kitten-like ways of Miss Bessie Folsom, and being

tolerably well sustained by her neighbors, sank at once to a low ebb in the person of a young clerk at the other end of the table. Mrs. Miller had been forced to admit that, between one week's end and another, he committed in a quiet way every practicable breach of table etiquette; but she said that he was unusually steady, that she had promised his mother to have a good influence over him, and that he was always on hand at night to help her lock up. So she gave him a few hints, which he tried diligently but in vain to remember, and placed his seat as far as possible from Miss Folsom and her friend, Miss Granger. Then there were two cousins of Mrs. Miller's, who were in New York for a musical education, and had a piano in their attic room; Mr. and Mrs. Thomson also, both white-haired, a little stout, and very grave; and a little, thin old lady, who climbed to the top of the house every night, and went straight to bed without any fire.

Another boarder was Mr. Willcox, a middle-aged business man, with closely-trimmed, sandy whiskers and mustache, and eyes that could be very merry. He dressed vilely, at least in Miss Folsom's opinion, and to-night incurred her displeasure with a bright plaid necktie. He was tall and somewhat awkward. He always knew when Miss Folsom made a change of dress, though he could never have told what she wore, and he had private musings over the invariable immaculateness of her collars, cuffs, and handkerchiefs. He talked little at table, and being opposite her and her friend, could not but listen to them.

Miss Folsom was a music teacher. She had no piano, and used to try her pupils' new pieces in the Misses Millers' room. Her dark brown hair grew low on her temples; her blue eyes were very quiet and decided, as if she already knew what she thought of her neighbors; her mouth had the same decision, but it yielded at times to very sweet little curves. Her features, in their combination, were far from pretty, but her figure was girlish, and her physical proportions were small and well-balanced. It was understood that her stay at Mrs. Miller's was a matter of a few weeks only, as she and her artist friend, Miss Granger, were to set up housekeeping together.

Miss Granger was very tall and thin, with a noticeably long nose and a homely mouth. If she had received from Nature a perfect form and a lovely face, they would in many ways have suited her spirit, for she had an artist's devotion to beauty of shape, the kindest of hearts, and a childish dependence on petting. Her lifelong exile in a figure which seemed more hideous to her than to any of her friends, taught a patient, sad look to her eyes; but it gave, perhaps, a greater perseverance to her pursuit of power in art than any other one thing could have done, and it certainly did not lessen her devotion to her younger friend. Miss Granger was not as desperately poor as an artist is supposed to be, and the expense of the prospective household was to be chiefly on her shoulders, till Miss Folsom's pupils should increase in number or remunerativeness.

Miss Wilton was introduced to Miss Folsom, though Mr. and Mrs. Thomson were between, also

to the Misses Miller opposite. Mrs. Thomson volunteered a few remarks about the weather and New York mud; but Miss Folsom, after a word of greeting, talked chiefly with Miss Granger and with the little, thin old lady, Miss Laval by name, who sat next to Mr. Willcox.

After dinner there was no ceremonious standing about, but each went to some occupation, as if very much at home. There was an odd nook in the dining-room, made by the sweep of the curved passage; here, according to custom, Willcox established himself with a newspaper, not even waiting for the ladies to pass out; Mr. and Mrs. Thomson sat down to backgammon in the sitting-room; Miss Laval, after fingering the books on the table in a short-sighted, purposeless way, as if, before her eyes gave out, it had been her custom to read in the evening, sat down by the fire and lost herself in reverie; the two Miller girls went to their rooms, and Miss Granger and Miss Folsom had it evidently in mind to retire to theirs, but seeing that Miss Wilton was standing alone, watching the proceedings, they stopped and spoke to her.

Miss Folsom took the lead, but it was the artist who seemed most impressed by the new-comer, and, as her friend spoke, she took mental measurements of Lilla's height and proportions.

"We consider this room quite a pleasant one," said Miss Folsom with a smile, at the same time studying Miss Wilton's face.

"It is so, certainly."

"You must not object," continued Miss Folsom,

"to the independence with which every one looks after himself. It is, after all, the best recommendation for a boarding-house that it does not try to imitate private hospitality. You are at perfect liberty to come and go without an invitation."

Miss Wilton bent her head, looking with some curiosity at the little music teacher. Perhaps it was Lilla's superior stature that made the look seem to Miss Folsom one of amusement and condescension. No one, however short, who sometimes converses with a shorter than himself, can fail to be aware of the moral stimulus of height. At this moment Willcox sauntered in from the dining-room, newspaper in hand, and approached the backgammon-table. Miss Folsom turned from Miss Wilton to him with an air of unconcern.

"The news must be unimportant this evening, Mr. Willcox."

"Quite so," answered that gentleman, wheeling about, as if pleased to be addressed. "I should n't have looked through the paper at all, if I had not hoped to find a suitable kitten advertised for your new establishment."

"I thought you knew," said Miss Folsom, laughing in spite of herself, "that Dennie has found a kitten for us."

"Miss Folsom, if you purchase one of the wild and hairy animals that Dennie affects, I shall never dare to call on you, even should I be invited to do so. Do you know that they are closely allied to the tiger and to the — what is that long-named brute? — camelopard? no, that is n't it."

"I hope not," said Miss Folsom, suppressing another laugh only enough to make it a very decided chuckle.

"Catamount! I've got it now. The mount, perhaps, suggested the camel."

Miss Folsom had resumed her gravity, and now moved towards the door with Miss Granger, who had exchanged a few words with Miss Wilton. Willcox, who wished to win another laugh, imprudently tried to detain them.

"Don't you think it 's too bad," he said, addressing Miss Wilton, "that ladies should go off this way every evening, making no effort to entertain their friends?"

Miss Folsom had some retort on her lips, being apparently displeased with the word he had chosen for their relation to each other, but Miss Wilton forestalled her.

"No," she answered, "not when gentlemen can find immediate solace in a cigar."

"But I don't smoke," said Willcox, looking a little surprised at the suggestion.

"Don't you?" asked Miss Folsom, with well-feigned astonishment.

"You must have noticed that before now."

"No," said Miss Folsom, shaking her head soberly; "I have not been here long enough to know the habits of the people. How funny! Why, I cannot think of a single man among *my* friends who does not smoke. Good-evening, Miss Wilton;" and Miss Folsom marched out of the room with military dignity, followed by Miss Granger, who, how-

ever, turned at the door and bowed in an apologetic way.

Lilla had a short conversation with Mrs. Miller, whom she thought a very decent sort of woman, and then went to her room. She found herself really more comfortable in this small room than in her over-large and uncomfortably furnished chamber at Mrs. Kelway's. Everything was satisfactory in point of neatness, and Elsa was within call of a bell. So when, the next day, she found that the apartment she had seen could be got into a habitable state within a week, and that then she would be allowed to take a hand in its furnishing, she decided to stay where she was for that week rather than go to a hotel. She called at the Kelways' to thank them for their hospitality, and to ask if her large trunk could remain there. Laura was out, and Mrs. Kelway declined to see her, so she wrote a note to express for her the thanks and the request.

Meanwhile, Miss Granger and Miss Folsom were busy over their own plans of housekeeping. Miss Folsom had an aunt, Mrs. Fuller, living in Connecticut, on a height overlooking the Sound. She would have been overjoyed to welcome her niece to her home, which was not without its luxuries of furniture and appointments, earned slowly by Mr. Fuller's literary labors. Of this uncle, a well-read and well-bred gentleman, Bessie Folsom was very fond; the struggle between her affection for his home and her love of independence, as well as of music, had been a very even thing till her only brother, Tom, left school and became a clerk in an insurance office in

New York. Then, dreading to leave him wholly without oversight in his new life, she decided to try her fortune at teaching music. By this time, she had ten or twelve scholars, and, being naturally cheerful and courageous, she enjoyed her life, and rejoiced over her small savings.

Of late, her intimacy with Miss Granger had brought changes into her plans. She now had the prospect of a comfortable little home with her best friend, where Tom could come and spend his evenings, where she could have a piano and the possessions which reminded her of her old country home, and where Miss Granger would have a magnificent studio, in which to develop the conceptions that crowded her brain. Her friend had insisted that, during the few months before this delightful establishment could be set on foot, Bessie should board with her at some place where she would be better fed than at the house where she found her; and, if Mrs. Miller's bills proved too heavy for Miss Folsom's pupils to offset, for the present she would pay them herself. Such is the assurance of real, equally matched friendship that Miss Folsom, who could seldom be induced to accept one of her Uncle Fuller's proffered loans, agreed to Miss Granger's propositions without the slightest hesitation.

She might well count on her indispensableness to her friend. Miss Granger was very dependent on affection and attention; though, in her rough contact with the world, she had learned to disregard in some measure her natural sensitiveness, she had saved it all for her friends. Their sympathy was a

constant necessity to her, and the opinion of Bessie Folsom — who, it must be said, had a great deal of it — was invaluable to her on almost every subject except painting.

One often wonders over the past of elderly women, especially of those like Miss Granger, whose dumbness and timidity and patient gravity suggest an early story of love and disappointment. Here no love story was involved, or none which others would have called by that name. She herself always looked back to a certain girlish experience as a proof to herself that she indeed carried a woman's heart. It had brought her great suffering, though her hero was quite unconscious of the fact; indeed, scarcely knew her by sight. At sixteen one has many sensitive points, many mortifications religiously concealed, and the sorrows of sixteen are those that one never forgets. Yet the cause of her suffering became to her the type of graciousness and beauty in a man, and in her early sketch-books she was often feeling dimly after the look of his face, or her glorified memory of it.

There is this consolation for all deficiencies or disadvantages under which mortal ever suffered, that in the very defect itself lies the possibility of spiritual strength and influence. Who would not be more affected by hope and courage in a woman like Miss Granger, beginning to see before her the shadows of age and weakness, than by the optimism of an innocently happy bride, to whom love and protection come even before she feels the need of them? And we may be sure that all the small lackings which

worry us and make us feel unable to meet our fellow-men on equal terms may each be the means whereby virtue shall flow into our words and deeds. Is there any success in life, among the many whereby a man tries to be a help and a glory to his race, comparable to that which may be his in extreme weakness; that is, convincing his fellows that there is indeed a God for human hearts, whose smile alone is sufficient for human happiness?

Miss Granger did not bear this testimony as strongly as she might have done. In her early life she had drifted off on one of the popular currents setting away from Christian belief; and, though she had partly recovered the old ground, she had never been able fairly to grasp the meaning of her disbelief, and so was always hampered by the spectres of the mind which it had raised. And yet the controlling desire of her heart, stronger than the need of friendly sympathy, stronger even than devotion to art and her secret, wild hopes of triumph in that direction, was that which Moses expressed in words that were very often near her lips: "And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." Her influence on Miss Folsom was perceptible, not in the way of imbuing her with her own opinions, but rather as suggesting religious topics as a new field in which Miss Folsom's own opinions might flourish.

Willcox, after the intimation he had received that he was not on the list of Miss Folsom's friends, did not attempt more than casual remarks to her at table; but he watched her none the less steadily, and respectfully made note of everything, from the pre-

cision of her necktie to her opinion on street-cleaning. Sometimes his amusement was too much for him, and once he withdrew hastily, to chuckle over his newspaper in the corner. When Miss Folsom rose from table, she paused and asked rather severely,

"May we know what has amused you so much?"

"Nothing, — a woman's wit," was the answer.

Miss Folsom looked mystified and passed on without further remark; and Willcox, rising, plunged his hands into his pockets and gazed into Mrs. Miller's back yard.

Miss Folsom had a game of checkers that evening with Miss Laval. Willcox sat on the other side of the room and read snatches from all the books on a shelf near by, listening half of the time to Miss Folsom's soft musical talk and delightful laughs.

"Shall we have another game now?" she asked.

"No," said Miss Laval; "it 's no fun for you. You beat me too easily."

"Oh, I am very fond of playing," protested Bessie, resetting the men.

Miss Laval, however, turned her chair to the fire, and put her feet, encased in worsted slippers, up against the fender. Willcox was now deep in Nelson on Infidelity, and no one spoke for several minutes. Bessie at last put the board away and stood by the mantelpiece, holding her little feet alternately to the fire, and telling Miss Laval of the Weber piano of beautiful tone which was to be hers for the winter.

"You know I teach two of the Meredith children, and Mrs. Meredith says my charge is absurdly low.

It may seem so to her, but I have spare time as it is. Well, at any rate, Mrs. Meredith with Mrs. Vincent have hired the piano for me for the season, and say they will make it up that way."

All this time a game of whist was going on in the room, but so quietly that Miss Folsom's remarks were very distinct, although she had lowered her voice during this last confidence. Just then, the front log of the fire gave way, and the brands came tumbling forward. Willcox laid down Nelson with great promptness, and coming near took the tongs from Miss Folsom's hand.

"I have a large experience in fires," he said, "being in the iron business and having begun in a foundry. Shall I put on another stick?"

"As you like," said Miss Folsom. "I am going upstairs."

"That 's right. Early hours are the best preservers of youthful bloom."

Willcox thought his own remarks devoid of sense this evening. He wished he could talk to her without trying to be facetious, and that she would speak to him frankly, as she did to Miss Laval. He rose from his knees, and said in a milder tone, as he looked down on her, —

"But you need n't begin on prescriptions yet."

"I don't believe," said Miss Folsom, "that you have the slightest idea how very old I am." The truth was she had just had a birthday, and felt a little sore.

"No adequate idea, I suppose; but I have my conceptions."

"Let us hear them," said Miss Folsom defiantly.

"Well, I think Miss Granger said that she knew you first when you were twenty-six years old, and you told Miss Laval she had been your friend four years. So, making a rough calculation, and allowing for the time it takes" — here Willcox smiled wickedly — "for an acquaintance with you to ripen into a friendship, I should judge you were somewhere between thirty and forty."

"I see you know," said Bessie mournfully. "Yes, I was thirty years old yesterday. What do you think of that?"

"I think that I wish I had known it yesterday, that I might have offered my hearty good wishes."

Miss Folsom heaved a little sigh.

"At thirty, one starts on the downward road. There 's no getting around that. Well, good-night, Miss Laval. Miss Granger and I have any number of things to talk over. We leave so soon. Good-night, Mr. Willcox."

Her tone was pleasant and soft as she spoke to him. Willcox felt duly grateful for the novelty, and, neatly replacing Nelson on the shelf, betook himself to his room and his writing-table.

"What do you think of Mr. Willcox?" was the question Miss Folsom asked after reaching her friend's room. The latter looked up, puzzled.

"I think he is a very nice gentleman," she replied, anxiously weighing the subject as requested. "What do *you* think of him?"

"I don't like him very much. He 's kind and good, but he 's probably an ordinary sort of man."

"That 's nice, is n't it?" said Miss Granger, nodding her head in approval, but somewhat absent-mindedly.

"What 's nice?"

"That the ordinary sort of man is kind and good."

Miss Folsom laughed, but did not explain herself.

The next morning, after breakfast, the two friends entered the sitting-room together, and finished a little talk they had begun upstairs.

"Now that I am really old," said Bessie confidentially, as they stood near the window, "I am going to take the comfort of it, and not try any more for the pleasures of eighteen. It was when I was about twenty, though, that I used to have the greatest fun. I used to spend two or three weeks every summer at the seashore, and we had picnics and rows and all sorts of sprees. I really was quite a leader, though you will hardly believe it; they none of them had a good time if I was n't there. But that was mostly nonsense. A woman of my age comes to know it. There is a solid side of life that is worth twice as much. I mean to begin now on thirty years of solid happiness. Oh dear!"

A most pathetic and deep-drawn sigh followed this happy prediction. Miss Granger could not but laugh, but her amusement was interrupted by a much more serious explosion from the other end of the curved passage. The laugh, once begun, had to be finished. Miss Folsom started in indignation.

"It 's that horrid man. What did I tell you?"

she said, quivering with resentment, and she dragged her friend away from the room.

"I shall simply cut him altogether," was her grim verdict that evening, as the two descended the stairs to dinner. "I shall not allow any such rudeness to go unnoticed."

"Of course not," said Miss Granger, echoing her decided tone.

The intended victim was not, however, at table; neither did he appear again at any meal during the remaining two days of their stay. So Miss Folsom was no more molested; and at last, to her great pleasure, she quitted boarding-house life, which had been her lot every winter for five years, and entered a home of her own.

Miss Wilton's preparations were going on at the same time, and soon after Miss Folsom's departure with her friend, she moved into her apartment. By taking her dinner in a restaurant in the same house, she thought she could depend on Elsa and herself for all necessary housework; and as her wardrobe was already well supplied, she might hope for a few months to meet the rent, which to her, fresh from Italian standards of expenditure, seemed ruinously high.

One day, as she was nearing home, she was suddenly confronted by a man whose face was obscurely familiar to her, and who stopped as if he, too, were struck by some uncertain remembrance. He looked a foreigner, and the associations he awakened, however dim, were of a most unpleasant kind.

"I recall to you Vienna, do I not," he said in German, "and the Vier Jahreszeiten?"

"You are not Herr Meyer?" said Lilla, bewildered.

"I am right, then," said the stranger, with a triumphant laugh. "No, I am not Herr Meyer. I was formerly his clerk, Herr Schreitenberger, at your service. I remember signing a complaint against you before the police authorities."

Lilla turned pale at these startling words, and then her fear gave way to sudden anger.

"You may remember also, then, what became of the emerald Herr Meyer must have received for me. You villain, to speak to me in such a way! The police authorities Herr Meyer would not willingly confront."

"I know nothing of emeralds. I know you, and that you"—

"Hush!" cried Miss Wilton, in an unnatural, high-pitched voice. "Step inside here a moment."

She opened the door of the apartment house where she lived. There was no one in its tiled entrance-hall. The elevator was waiting without an attendant; those who wished his services had to ring for him. Lilla turned, and eyed her persecutor with a very ominous expression.

"You perhaps don't know what the laws are in New York. They don't allow ladies to be insulted in the streets."

"I have been here two weeks," said Schreitenberger, with a grin, "and have n't yet seen an honest man or woman. If New York has laws, I have yet to learn it."

"You will learn it, if you speak to me again. As

for Herr Meyer, I will write to him for his bill. I thought he would be satisfied with stealing my emerald. If not, I will pay him. There shall be no question as to where I stand."

Schreitenberger was looking about him, and scarcely seemed to listen.

"You are in a fine nest this time," he said admiringly.

Something rose in Lilla's throat, nearly choking her. *She* was forced to stand without answer in the presence of this man, to whom her honesty was only that of a thief under arrest. The degradation was overwhelming, and as soon as she could catch her breath, she cried out, —

"Go, go away, you wretch, you scoundrel, you!"

Schreitenberger looked at her in cool surprise. Her horror was not feigned. She was a bird of a different color from what he had supposed. "For how much?" he asked at length.

"I 'll give you fifty dollars, if you 'll never come near me again."

Schreitenberger laughed scornfully.

"Five hundred would be nearer my figure," he said. He looked with renewed attention at her dress, and at the fittings of the hall in which they stood. "I will take a day, and then let you know what my silence may be worth to you."

"The whole bill was n't more than a hundred dollars," said Miss Wilton, rallying herself from the weakness she had so fatally displayed to him.

"It 's no longer a question of the bill."

"But it is;" said Miss Wilton with renewed cour-

age. "I owe you nothing, and now that I reflect upon it, I prefer to settle the matter with Herr Meyer. Do what you like. I am not afraid."

"We will compromise on two hundred."

"Never. This is pure absurdity. In paying you money, I gain nothing."

Schreitenberger paused to consider.

"I have with me," he said, "some stamped paper of the hotel. It is not what is used for bills, but what of that? I will make out your bill. It was two hundred and forty florins and thirty-five kreutzers. That I remember. You give me the date, and I will date it and sign as clerk for Herr Meyer. Then, whether good or not in Vienna, it would be good against me. For this you pay me what I said — five hundred dollars."

"I would do it for half that," said Lilla. "I will think it over. You make out such a receipt, and I will see. But you are never to come to this house again."

She took his address, promising to arrange for another interview soon, and when she found that he was content to depart with this promise, she drew a long breath of relief.

Lilla was not one to look far ahead, or far behind either. This unpaid bill had not worn upon her. It is doubtful if she had thought of it once where Elsa did ten times. She felt sure that the Viennese hotel-keeper had dishonestly kept a valuable stone sent to the hotel for her, which had never reached her. In her mind this more than counterbalanced her own shortcomings. Of course she would never

have made this reprisal, if she had had money enough to meet his bill and also to get to Paris. When one had no money, it was more honest to go than to stay.

Now that the matter had come up again, she would pay for a hotel receipt the amount of the bill and a little more. She would pay two hundred dollars, perhaps; that would be a good deal more, but she could hardly expect him to take less.

To get even this sum, she must borrow, for just now she was living up to the very edge of her income. How to borrow of strangers in a strange city was the question, but unfortunately it was one which her European experience had taught her how to solve, — always in one way, and always without Elsa's knowledge.

It was accordingly within a few days that Lilla was standing on a crowded street, having just come come out of a pawnbroker's shop. Mr. Davids, who kept this shop, after making inquiries about her, had been very polite, and had not insisted on any security. His rate of interest was indeed most wonderfully high, but for a short time this would not matter very greatly. As Lilla stood thus for a moment, a young man on the opposite side of the street stood watching her. The shop had been crowded. Lilla had made her way out hastily, and just outside had thrust something into her pocket. Something also fell to the ground, and our observer, picking it up a moment later, put it into his waistcoat pocket and started slowly after her down the street. Late that afternoon Elsa announced to Miss Wilton that

some one was waiting to see her in her reception-room.

"A gentleman?" she asked.

"Not exactly a gentleman," said Elsa doubtfully.

"I can't see him," said Miss Wilton, starting back as if frightened. "Ask him to leave a message, or write through the mails. Tell him I will not speak with him."

After Elsa had gone with this message, Lilla, too much disturbed to remain behind, followed to where she could make sure of the stranger's exit. Then she heard an unfamiliar voice, remonstrating good-naturedly with Elsa's assertions. The careless, jovial tone was such a relief that Lilla, disregarding her own message, went immediately forward to relieve the girl from her dilemma.

The young fellow standing there hat in hand was unknown to her, as she had not seen him watching her that morning. He bowed easily, and smiled as he saw that Miss Wilton had no intention of asking him inside.

"Pardon me," he began, taking an envelope from his pocket, "I believe you were at Mr. Davids's this morning."

He stopped abruptly, as if he expected an assent, but Lilla was silent.

"Am I mistaken?" he added, looking doubtfully at the envelope in his hand. "This is Miss Wilton?"

"Yes, I was there," said Lilla shortly. "Do you bring a message from Mr. Davids?"

"No; I 'm afraid I am not explaining myself

rightly. My name is Raynor. I have it written here." He laid a card on the table. "A five dollar bill was dropped just outside the shop, and it is thought to belong to you."

"I will see," said Miss Wilton, and she passed into the next room to count the bills in her pocket. "It is mine," she said, coming back and accepting the envelope from Raynor's hand. "I am much obliged to you."

"Not at all," said the young fellow, moving towards the door, "I am too well acquainted with that place myself, and know the value of a five dollar bill."

Miss Wilton looked again at his newest of new clothes, and wondered if he would accept a dollar for his services. Raynor's eye followed hers, with amusement. He evidently was not at all disinclined to linger.

"Save it," he said quietly, "for some poor fellow who has nothing to pawn. You and I are both in clover for days to come."

Lilla found it impossible to be offended at his insinuations. She replied gravely, —

"Your inference is natural, but does not happen to be correct. I am sorry if you have adopted pawning as a means of livelihood. I don't think much of it."

"I don't either. It 's a deuced sight pleasanter borrowing on mortgages, expectations, and such like securities. It lasts longer, and meanwhile one can wear real jewelry."

He glanced at Miss Wilton's ruby ring, bowed respectfully, and left the room.

Lilla looked at his name a moment in amusement, then threw the card into the fire. The five dollar note was treated with more consideration.

After his departure, Elsa came back into the room on some pretext, and soon took occasion to inquire about this visitor.

"Hardly a gentleman, Elsa," returned Miss Wilton.

"Mademoiselle thinks him an honest man?"

"He came to do a very honest act. I had dropped a five dollar bill in the street, and he came to return it."

"And why did he not return it on the street?"

"I don't know, I 'm sure. What a cross-questioner you are!" said Lilla, laughing.

"Then if he comes again, Mademoiselle, I am to admit him?"

"Why on earth should he come again? If he does, yes, of course. I don't shut my doors on those who have conferred favors on me, even if they do remind one a little of photographs of celebrated counterfeiters."

CHAPTER V.

Poor Willcox was left in disgrace when Miss Granger and her friend withdrew to the privacy of their own home. He did not return to take his meals at Mrs. Miller's till every trace of them had disappeared, but then he looked around wistfully, as though he repented not having come a little earlier. He no longer laughed at any one in his former ungentlemanly manner; in fact, he found hardly matter enough for a smile, and was meekly grateful for any friendly overtures from Mrs. Miller. He asked her one day if it was right for a gentleman to write to a lady on whom he had never called.

"Not to open a correspondence," said Mrs. Miller. "You could write to any woman, if you had something special to say, — a matter of business, or anything important."

Willcox said no more, not wishing to ask too many questions of one person. But one day, coming out of his place of business with a Mr. Peters, who worked in the same office, a man whom he did not altogether like, he looked so sober that Peters inquired playfully if he were going to be hung.

"Worse," said Willcox. "I am going to write a letter to a woman who perhaps won't read it."

"Can't you make it pleasanter, then?"

"It can't be pleasant. It 's an apology."

"Oh, an apology! Then, take my word for it, Willcox, if she does n't read it herself, she 'll get her best friend to read it to her, and she 'll look over at the interesting parts."

The encouragement was worth something to Willcox, who that evening wrote the following epistle: —

My dear Miss Folsom, — When a man is down is the time to pity him, and that time has come with me.

You will forgive my writing to explain what needs so much explanation. I was reading the paper in my corner, as I usually do. I was not aware of anything you were saying in the next room till very near the time you ended. It will take a good deal of charity on your part to accompany my apology further, but I was thoroughly amused, and did not reflect how rude it might appear in me to show it. I cannot let the matter pass without offering a very humble apology, and stating that however grievous my offense, eavesdropping was no part of it.

Hoping that you will believe in the reality of my contrition,

I am, my dear Miss Folsom,
Your obedient servant,
James Willcox.

Miss Bessie Folsom, care Miss Granger.

This composition seemed correct, unless the opening paragraph were too abrupt. That had been the inspiration of the moment, and really struck Willcox

as the most telling part. But, when a couple of days had passed bringing no answer, he began to wish that paragraph had been left out. Another day made him wish the whole letter omitted; but that feeling was but transient. He would not have been happy not to apologize, and had done it as well as he could. It was easy to understand, too, that she could not write him a letter. What could she say? That she forgave him? She would not wish to take it so seriously. Obviously, there was nothing for her to do but accept it and be civil when they next met. When they next met! When would that be likely to happen? After all, ladies usually answered respectful notes. Or, at least, he would soon discover what ladies would do.

It was at a time when he was thinking of matters widely different that a little square note appeared among his letters. He actually tore it open and looked at the signature without once thinking. "Elizabeth Folsom!" This stately involution of the little name he knew was bewildering.

"Oh, Bessie!" he exclaimed in a moment. "I thought at first she had got her great-aunt to answer for her."

Then he turned back with some trepidation. The letter ran: —

MY DEAR MR. WILLCOX, — I have received the note which you were so kind as to write to me.

Miss Granger and I are now fully established in our little home. The cat, even, is not missing. If you have, some evening, a little spare time, I hope

you will come and see how comfortably we are situated. Very truly yours,

ELIZABETH FOLSOM.

An invitation to call! It was like a reward. The perfection of the little note, the handwriting, the fragrance, as if it had lain all night among her handkerchiefs, — all was duly appreciated, and Willcox felt deeply insulted when Peters inquired jovially if his apology had been read at headquarters. He replied in a gruff way that the note had needed no answer, and was cross with himself that he could have mentioned the matter to such a man as Peters. He must cure himself of this habit of confiding in every one who came near him.

He went to call, of course, putting on his Sunday clothes, whereas, if he had only known, one of his business suits was the only one Miss Folsom thought tolerable.

Miss Granger's palatial abode was but part of a house, and that the top part, but it was very comfortable and homelike. The room in which he found the ladies had a painted floor with soft brown rugs over it, muslin curtains, and Miss Folsom's piano in the corner. Here she was practicing when he knocked; — he had been told to walk up two flights and knock at the front room. Miss Granger was sewing by the drop-light, and both gave him a kind welcome.

About ten minutes later, when they had talked of Mrs. Miller and each of her boarders, present company excepted, Willcox gathered courage to look at

Bessie a little. She wore a plain dress, to which he was quite accustomed, and some curious little shoes, in which her feet seemed quite lost. She was hemming towels, taking a multitude of small stitches with great rapidity. She had already laughed in the old way over something he said, and the look of interest still lingered around her mouth.

Willcox knew well that behind this frankness and kindness were hidden very definite thoughts about himself and his every action. Yet, though painfully conscious of himself, he knew that he was not doing anything very bad just then, and, in fact, was talking with marvelous ease.

Miss Folsom happened to mention her early home in Massachusetts, now long passed into other hands.

"I come from the Connecticut River, too," said Willcox; "but from much further up. I am a New Hampshire boy."

"And you spoke of your mother once," said Bessie. "Is she living there still?"

"Yes, and my father too. I get off occasionally and spend Sunday up there."

"They must be very glad to see you," said Miss Granger.

"Well, I am the only son, you see, and my sisters are both married and settled elsewhere. Mother is n't always very well there during the hard winters, and I have tried to induce her to come to New York. But she is living where her father did before her, and loves the place, and feels that her duty lies there; and I don't think she will ever leave it."

"Do you board at Mrs. Miller's the year round?" asked Miss Folsom, examining the right side of the towels to see that her stitches were properly invisible.

"I can't in the summer-time. She closes for a number of weeks. I am always the first to return, though. I don't like boarding down town, or anywhere else, in fact."

After this there was a short silence, Willcox reflecting that his preferences as to boarding-places were not particularly interesting. As he could not think of anything that would be more so, he rose and said a little awkwardly, —

"Well, I think I must be going, now."

Miss Folsom rose, too, with what seemed to him unnecessary alacrity.

"Don't hurry, Mr. Willcox."

"Thank you, I am afraid I must. What an idiot I am!" he said to himself, as he retreated towards the door, and with sudden resolution he turned back a moment, feeling indeed more master of himself when he was once firmly on his legs.

"By the way, Miss Folsom, I should like to hear from your own lips, if I may, that you have forgotten my rudeness of the other day."

"Would n't it be a better proof if I should forget to mention it?" said Bessie, beginning to laugh.

"No, I could n't be deceived that way."

Willcox looked this time straight into her eyes with willful persistence; then added, with sudden humility, —

"Perhaps it was one of those things that can't be forgotten, but only forgiven."

Bessie was touched by his meekness. She said kindly, —

"You must be thinking of something much more serious than anything I remember."

"Thank you, Miss Folsom," said Willcox, looking gratefully at her. "I shall feel better now."

This did not seem to him very much to say, but perhaps his tone was very sincere. At all events, Bessie broke into a little flattered laugh. Such a sweet, susceptible, feminine laugh it was! It did not stop him in his movement toward the door, but it emboldened him to pause there and say, —

"You know I never meet you anywhere. Could I come again before very long?"

"Certainly," said Miss Folsom, in a tone, nevertheless, which Willcox interpreted unfavorably. She looked admonishingly at Miss Granger.

"We shall be very glad to see you, I am sure," said the artist, "whenever you care to drop in on us."

Willcox made a bow and went out.

"You need n't speak of him as though he were a thunderbolt," said Bessie, laughing after he had gone. " 'Dropping in on us ' sounds a little frightful."

"Was n't he pleased, don't you think?" asked her friend anxiously.

"Oh, yes, I think he was very much pleased."

Bessie's simile had been apt. The call did seem to Miss Granger a little startling and uncomfortable. It was chiefly because masculine ways were so unaccountable, so difficult to be foretold or depended upon.

"I 'm sure it was very kind of him to come," she said appreciatively. "I am afraid he did n't enjoy himself much."

Bessie laughed again, and at last went back to her piano.

It was true that Willcox never met Miss Folsom anywhere, and the reason was but too obvious. He stayed down town till nearly dark, walked home by a street she would not be likely to choose, and spent his evenings at Mrs. Miller's. One day, however, he came up town at noon to find a possible customer, and wondered if he might not run across her. There were numberless young women about, but no one looked in the least like her. He lunched up town, and afterwards was making his way across the city, when he actually, and against all probability, saw her little figure, hesitating at a muddy crossing, and loaded with two immense music-books. She saw him, and looked a little displeased, but he came across with a few leaps and raised his hat.

"Let me help you with those books a little way."

"No, I can't," said Bessie. "That would be asking more than a small politeness of you."

Willcox laughed, and appropriated them.

"Bundle-carrying is an old trade of mine," he said.

Miss Folsom apparently did not notice his remark, being far along in an explanation of how she had had this music bound for a pupil, and the binder had stupidly sent the books to her address instead of the pupil's. She seemed relieved now to be rid of them, and devoted herself to the protection of her skirts from the muddy crossings and curbstones.

It was certainly bewitching to walk beside her. It made things so clear. When he was away from her, his thoughts were so fitful and unaccountable that he was almost afraid he was in love with her. Now he could understand matters and see plainly that he was not. She was not pretty. He could see that very clearly, and was remarkably glad that she was not. The black hair, the almost solemn eyes, the decided little mouth, were a great pleasure to him; for the very reason, as it seemed to him, that they were too marked and characteristic to suggest any one else. Whatever might be accused of prettiness, — the well-proportioned figure, the feet, whose broad walking-shoes were so small in their utmost circumference, the lip and ear, — all was to him simply she, without the prettiness. Any beauty she had not, he held in contempt. Having thus reassured himself as to his entire self-control, he began to talk to her with more ease.

"Have you any more lessons to give to-day?"

"Yes, one more."

"And then you are going home?"

"I believe so," said Bessie in a cold tone; as much as to say, "but that is nothing to you."

Willcox felt unjustly treated, not having had the remotest idea of troubling her further that afternoon.

"Why, this is the afternoon of the Philharmonic," he said suddenly. "Did n't you tell me you meant to attend those rehearsals?"

"Yes," said Bessie, looking up with mournful interest; "I did think of going."

Willcox looked a respectful inquiry, and Bessie answered bravely, with a little laugh, in fact, —

"Music is n't a vital necessity, and gloves are."

Willcox laughed with her at this jocose state of affairs, and then grew very sober. He wondered how much she really cared for music. He himself, having both the time and the money, had not for years entered a music-hall or theatre, but she was perhaps pining for it. He had wonderful ideas about her sensitiveness to art of all kinds, got, perhaps, from the look of pathos often in her eyes.

"I think I saw you last Sunday," said Bessie, suddenly breaking the silence.

"Where? At church?" asked Willcox, astonished, and certain that he had not passed her in the street.

"Yes. Miss Granger had a friend who was baptized, and I went with her. I have never before been in a Baptist church."

Willcox was silent from a multiplicity of thoughts. He recalled the service afresh in the light of this knowledge; — the three immersions, the long doctrinal sermon, the singing which even he felt was painful. In the absence of one of the deacons, he had passed the contribution-box. How would all that impress her? Not favorably, he felt.

Miss Folsom at his church! He should not now feel safe anywhere.

"Where do you go to church?" he asked at last.

"Miss Granger attends service at the little Episcopal church near us. I sometimes go with her, but not very often."

"You must tell me if you come to our church again. I might drop the contribution-box, if I came across you suddenly."

"Oh," said Bessie almost sternly, "it was a mere chance my going there. I shall never do it again."

It was plain that she disapproved of it and of his connection with it. He wanted to explain to her that he was not really a deacon, but stopped, ashamed of himself.

"I suppose immersion is hardly pleasing to you," he said.

Miss Folsom gave a little shudder.

"I never did see any sense in baptism, anyway," she replied; then, changing her tone, "We are almost there, now. I hope those heavy books have n't tired you."

"Not at all. I am glad they have n't tired you," said he gravely. "Is this the place? Good afternoon."

He stood with his hat lifted, but without a smile. Bessie was pleased that he should have found out how different they were. She took the books from him, thanking him very cordially, and ran lightly up the steps.

This remark of Miss Folsom's that she saw no sense in baptism stood for a great deal with Willcox, and occurred to him almost daily for weeks. Her attitude was probably the same towards the whole service. What he looked upon as the one reality of life and the hope of the world seemed to be an object of dislike to her. Perhaps not quite that; he knew she called herself Christian; but her

attitude towards life, so far as he knew, did not confront its moral relations and necessities. Or, if these things did come into her philosophy, and Christ's teachings were her faith, how could she show the coldness she certainly did to religious subjects, or speak in that horribly dogmatic way about one of the sacraments of Christ's church on earth? Sometimes he tried to think that her dislike was simply for ecclesiastical forms as injuring the true spirit of Christianity; but again, as he sought in vain for an outlet or expression, in her life, of spiritual fire, he thought he had found as grim a little heathen as ever was at the same time an attractive member of society.

With this cloud still on him, but with a great desire to hear her say something more on the subject, he made his second call when February was already well advanced.

This time Miss Granger was busy in her studio, and Bessie did not call her down. She made Willcox take a chair near the fireplace, saying she knew it was a chilly night out, and then she knelt and lit the fire. Willcox made no objection to this extravagance, as he saw she was cold herself. It was an odd sensation to have her moving deftly about to make him comfortable, and, when she sat down by the table to her mending, he noticed that she was quieter and paler than he had ever before seen her. It lessens one's dislike and fear of heresy to have the heretic look sad, as if, even to prejudiced and unfair thinkers, life brings its self-denials and crosses. Her work was darning a man's sock, and Willcox thought with sudden horror that her pupils might

be falling off, and that she might be forced to take in sewing; but then he remembered her brother, and in fact soon discovered the initials, "T. F.," on a pair lying near him. What, then, was the trouble? Willcox was bound to find out.

Mysteries not too frightful or important are apt to yield to a determination like this. Willcox, after learning that her teaching was even more remunerative than ever, and her health and Miss Granger's health good, found that he had hit the tender point in some allusion to her brother, and before long Tom's misdeeds were laid before him. They came under two heads: an inconstancy of mind in the choice of a business, which augured ill for his success, and, she was afraid, the beginning of habits of drinking. She knew but little as to this, and could influence him still less; but as she spoke her lip trembled a little, and she worked very busily, without looking up.

"Almost all young men," began Willcox, after a pause, "have a time of susceptibility to such temptations. He can't have formed any such habits yet, of course."

"I don't know," said Bessie. "For three years I have seen but little of him. Perhaps he did it at school. I don't believe they were very strict there."

"I wish I could make his acquaintance," said Willcox thoughtfully.

Bessie's face brightened at once.

"I wish he did know you. Why won't you come here to tea on Saturday and meet him?"

Willcox heaved a little sigh, thinking how easily

invitations could slip out when there was any reason for them. Then he replied, —

"It might be better if I could meet him down town. Who are his employers, or has he any particular friends? I may know them."

"Ah, you see, he has left the office where he was. One of his most intimate friends is a man named Burnham, — in a wholesale clothing establishment; I don't believe you would know him."

Willcox shook his head.

"What kind of work is he looking for?"

"Almost any kind of office work. He took a great dislike to the man he was under at the insurance office and left. It was a great disappointment to me, for it was a place where he had a chance to rise."

"Would he like to do a little traveling in the iron line? I suppose he knows nothing about machinery."

"I think he would like it; and he could learn, if some one would have patience with him."

Willcox could not but feel the sudden respectfulness in her voice at this intimation that he had such benefits at his disposal. After a moment's deliberation, he said, —

"Any one who cares to make a man of himself can do it in the iron trade, and only such can be of much use. If you will send your brother to me some day, we will talk the matter over and see how far our ideas agree. If it is hard work he wants, I think I can give it to him."

"I will tell him," said Bessie, "and I hope he

will go. It is very kind of you, Mr. Willcox. If he does not see it in that light, *I do.*"

Willcox was accustomed to her emphatic way of announcing her own sentiments, and thought it more charming than ever. She talked a little more about her brother in a much happier strain, and then asked if Mr. Willcox had heard of her plans. Miss Granger had arranged to go into the country towards the middle of April, and take possession of a little farm-house on a bare and breezy hill in Connecticut. There she would catch on her canvas the early tints of spring, and there Miss Folsom was to join her a little before the first of May.

"I shall call that my vacation, and do absolutely nothing for a few weeks; then I shall go to my aunt's on the Sound and try to make myself useful. But I count on at least three weeks of blue sky and idleness."

This information Mr. Willcox received with soberness.

"It 's a great pity," he said, "that I don't belong to that happy set of people who can migrate when the sunshine comes. At the office, they think my two days every month or two to go to New Hampshire rules out the summer vacation, and every year about this time — well, it has come earlier than usual this year — I have an attack of country homesickness. So many of my friends go off into the summer-time."

"They don't melt, then, at your appeal and spend their holiday in New York?" said Bessie a little hard-heartedly.

"Not often."

Willcox made this short answer with a strange sensation at his heart. He saw through a long vista the summer-time, — the trees, the shadows, the thick grass, and Bessie rambling alone amid the warm fragrance of earth and flowers. And he chained to his desk and his figures! So he stammered along in a tone more eloquent than his words,—

"But you won't think, will you, just because I 'm not one of those fancy fellows that can follow their wishes, that I don't like shady lanes, and don't have the right kind of thoughts even down town at my desk?"

This was not half of what he meant, and he looked appealingly at Bessie, as if she might understand the rest. She, however, acknowledged the pathos of his words only by a quiet and inscrutable nod, and Willcox, dissatisfied, rose and kicked back the front log of the fire.

"Is this your wood-fire, or Miss Granger's?"

"Miss Granger's, of course."

"Then let 's have on another log. I don't believe your hands are warm yet."

"For yourself, if you wish," said Bessie, smiling. "The room is all right for me."

"Oh, I 'm quite warm and comfortable," said Willcox rather drearily. "Is there anything else to do before I leave? Would you like to play to me?"

Miss Folsom stared at him and laughed.

"You don't care for music, do you?"

"I don't know; I suppose not; but it would n't hurt to try."

"That is only politeness, I guess."

Willcox shook his head with the same indifference.

"Oh, no; I could do better than that if I set out to be polite. I won't insist; only the next thing is for me to go."

"If the programme is so short, we must encore the first part."

"What? The conversation? That is kind of you, but it is getting to be late, and I have a pretty long walk home. I left my overcoat in the corner, I think. Yes, there it is."

"I sha'n't forget," said Bessie soberly, "your kind offer to talk things over with Tom."

"I shall be very glad if we agree."

"Then may he call some morning next week?"

"Any morning before Friday."

"I am very much obliged. Good-night."

She held out her hand cordially, and her blue eyes shone very mildly upon him. This he credited to her brother's account. For himself he had nothing to think over but the grave and inexpressive nod with which she had received his appeal for sympathy. But then it was a great deal to have a recognized right to call on a woman like her, and that he now surely had.

CHAPTER VI.

ROBERTSON had one day returned from a ride, and had at an early hour made himself ready to dine at the Merediths', as he expected Seton to come in first. The latter arrived at about dusk, and, though not in evening dress, had an air of festivity, and wore in his buttonhole a couple of moss rosebuds.

"An enterprising manager you are," he said, taking a seat, "to cut us dead at our first rehearsal."

"I leave it to you to do the talking," returned Arnold unabashed. "I am the power behind the scenes."

"Then you 're a dead failure. The Sierra Nevada side-scenes, one of them, got perfectly jammed. It was the miners' refreshment-hut, and we had liquor for sale all through the New York ball-scene."

"That 's lifelike. But what sort of a play does it make on the stage? Are there any situations to speak of?"

"It 's fine, Arnold. It 's immense. Stanton is the mainstay of it all, and Miss Wilton looks what she does n't act. It 's going to be a success. Situations? Yes. You remember the gist of the play? The young officer who flirts easily with the poor miner's daughter in California can't be made to believe in his own chances when the tables are turned and she comes to New York, the mistress of untold

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wealth. He simply has n't a soul large enough to understand a woman's devotion, and she spends the rest of the play in teaching him what rubbish a fortune is in the light of true love."

"It would take that length of time, I think, to convince the audience."

"If you 're posing for a cynic, Arnold, I congratulate you. It 's the easiest of rôles. There is one thing I believe, and that is that Miss Wilton meant every word the play put in her mouth, and if she believes in true love, that makes it just so far a fact in the world. If there are one or two other women that can see that same vision, then the world is by so much more a world to be happy in; and every disbelieving scoff is also true, and is part of the wretched fact it asserts."

Arnold was completely crushed, and said so.

"You may say," continued Seton, "that I have n't always thought so well of Miss Wilton; but seeing is believing, is n't it? You should have seen her, that is Florrie Lynton, in the last act. It is a year, you know, after her parting with Lieutenant Standish. Her mother is urging her to encourage the suit of a young Western millionaire, especially as their own sudden wealth is in danger of collapse. This young Crœsus is giving a ball for her, and Standish is to be present. He has caught sight of her in the ball-room, and comes on the stage in great excitement. Standish is a gentleman in every way, which young Crœsus is not, though generous enough. It is mainly his own poverty that has kept him away. Also he had thought their flirtation mere trifling on

both sides. Now he has seen her again, and he turns into a conservatory to conceal his tumult of heart. He hears her coming, and hides among the plants. Then Miss Wilton, I mean Miss Lynton, appears in the doorway in ball-dress, a look of trouble in her eyes, as if she were dimly conscious that he was near; and there she stands, Arnold, beautiful as the stars, and her thoughts — where? I am not good enough to know. And no one is. It is something, even if it is only for five minutes, to see true love in a woman's eyes, and it is humiliating to think how the world moves on with but hints of what might be, loves and heroisms blighted everywhere in the germ, all for lack of men worth one throb of loyalty. One feels it in this play, though Standish is supposed to come out well. He certainly is again in love, as he would call it. His excitement, his remorse, his amusing social contests with his rival of the well-lined purse, his triumphant good-breeding and tact, are all effective. But Florrie Lynton is now impervious to the most graceful and assiduous wooing. Only to young Crœsus does she confide the fact that those few weeks in a mining-camp have made it impossible for her to expect happiness again. She tells her mother that she cannot marry Crœsus, though he generously urges his suit the more when he hears of her father's losses. She summons Standish to a final interview, and tells him briefly and composedly of her approaching journey. He retorts by an impassioned declaration of love; he says he has acted the part of a fool, if not a knave, but that at last he sees clearly, and his one great wish is to

win her for his wife. Miss Lynton is not the easy prize he seems to expect. From across the stage she utters slowly and finely her rejection of his offer and contempt for his character. She shows him to himself, first as a man trying to win a love he did not wish, then, when circumstances make that love a matter of some value, unable to believe in the loyalty that was then at his command. She has tried to put a different interpretation on the silence that was breaking her heart. Perhaps a manly though mistaken independence was keeping him from her. To-night this last illusion is dispelled. He has no such delicacy, nor humility enough to suggest to him a doubt of success after a year of neglect. Fortunately, it will not be hard to save herself from further persecution. She need only mention the cause of her westward journey, namely, her father's sudden loss of fortune."

"Rather neat, was n't it?" said Arnold.

"It was, really. She did it well, too. I don't care what you say, Arnold. She knows the relative value of a man's character and his possessions. To see her and to hear her, even if it is only a stage part, makes the world a different place."

"Is there anything left of the lieutenant under this heavy artillery?"

"He looks at her steadily and quietly. She feels it, and almost lacks breath and spirit to complete her arraignment. At her last thrust he only smiles. Then he speaks very frankly and indeed humbly. He pleads guilty to having first sought her society for amusement only, and to having then failed to

leave her when he found he was giving and receiving something more. He also tried to forget her when she became an heiress, and to believe that she would forget him. Not till this evening has he known he was mistaken. Then he says that he has for some days known of her loss of fortune, for Mrs. Lynton had not neglected to inform him. After this revelation, he pauses a moment to let it have its full effect. Then he tells her of his expected promotion, and the sort of home he can offer her. The end is rather dramatic, for while he is describing his own probable rejection at her hands, she is gradually stealing nearer to him, and his final words become a satire on the happy reality. The lieutenant becomes really eloquent. 'I know the more brilliant prospects open to you,' he says, 'but I have now learned enough of you to attribute my dismissal, if it must come to that, to the right cause; not that riches and position can tempt you from loyalty to your first love, but that my sins have been too grievous, changing to bitterness and despair what to a man worthy of it would have been' — it is at 'would have been' that she is at last in his arms — '*would have been* unchangeable happiness.' "

"Yes, I remember that close. I thought there was a chance there for an effect."

"It brought down the house, if ten or fifteen of us may be called a 'house.' By the way, Crœsus was not wanting in our small audience."

Robertson looked annoyed.

"Not old Schenck."

"No, thank goodness. A man named Gardiner,

a railroad man; a cad, I fancy, and going on towards forty; just the man for a Standish to walk over."

It was not difficult to see who, in Seton's imagination, was fitted for this triumphant rôle. Robertson smiled as he listened to him, not ill-pleased that he had arrived at a more favorable view of Miss Wilton's character.

"I have had a happy thought," said Seton, later, as he was taking his leave; "and Fred Stanton offers me the base material setting necessary to do it justice. In other words, I want to have a drive out of town and a supper to celebrate this successful play, and Stanton offers me his coach. I count on you, of course. It is to be on the day after the play, if the weather permits. I want you, too, to invite your sister and Miss Monroe in my behalf. By the way, you will let me say that I was daring enough to tell Miss Wilton that if I was successful in securing Miss Monroe, she would see the handsomest, softest woman's eyes in the city of New York. I find that absolute candor is not always a bad policy. It shows that one's judgment is of some intrinsic value. And when the eyes in question shine only on others, I submit that my tribute has every claim to good faith and impartiality."

When Seton had gone, Arnold went out, and, as it still lacked a half hour of his dinner engagement, he wandered up and down, enjoying the fresh air and the sight of many people.

It was not long since he had taken the step of which he had spoken to Edith, and had publicly

taken on himself the name of a Christian. After all, it had been in connection with his father's church, as his frank confession of his belief as it was had not proved a stumbling-block. Now his spirit was hot within him to find what the law of Christ was for a man of his day. Nowhere, either in the church or out of it, did he find an example he would content himself to follow. No one, not even Edith, expected of him the things he expected of himself. He felt, as perhaps only the young feel, the frightful discrepancy between the life of the spirit and the life of the world. But every effort was vain to rid himself of the fetters of his own position and part in this unjust and unlovely order of things; and as yet he saw but dimly the vision which experience sometimes brings of the whole hard system used and moulded and eventually transfigured by the life of God within it. Meanwhile, in spite of his inward conflicts, his days were becoming more peaceful, his heart happier than ever before. His life seemed already valuable and touched with dignity. While actual achievement is still in the future, perhaps nothing can better arouse this sense of value in a man's life than the tribute in a woman's eyes. If this were the explanation, Arnold was quite unconscious of it. He was still deep in happy thoughts as he reached the Merediths' house.

Mr. Meredith was about forty years old, a man of a simple and genial nature. His complexion was fresh with the ruddiness of health and good temper. Though a hard-working man, he always left his business behind him when he came up town, and his

chief relaxation was in circulating choice bottles of wine among his many good friends in the after-dinner hour. He was devoted to his wife.

The first thing one usually noticed about Mrs. Meredith was that she dressed well, or at least with careful regard to the latest fashions; next came the wish that one had noticed first her more womanly attractions. Just what she was under her graciousness of manner, few people knew. She disguised herself under a veil of kindness, — a veil too beautiful to lift. Thus it was that her hospitality and her husband's were sharply contrasted. Geniality with him was self-revelation, with her it was self-seclusion.

They had three children, two of whom took piano-lessons of Miss Folsom. Mrs. Meredith had tried hard to persuade Bessie to live with them as general governess, but the latter's relations with Miss Granger stood in the way.

Arnold had talked for a few minutes with his hostess when Mr. Meredith came in from another part of the house with Miss Wilton and Miss Goldthwait, his wife's sister, one on either arm. He laid a heavy hand on Arnold's shoulder.

"Name your price, sir," he said jovially. "Tell us the lowest figure you will accept in the name of distressed humanity. I want to see how many pennies I shall have over for a yacht I intend to build."

Robertson rose as he replied, —

"It is with Mrs. Meredith that you must make terms. Her socialism is far more daring than mine."

"Is Mr. Robertson dangerous?" asked Lilla, returning gravely his salutation.

"Fatally so. He believes in himself, which is all the testimony you women care for. But don't stop here. I see the dining-room has just been thrown open;" and he led the way in with his guest and sister-in-law.

Stanton came in late to dinner, and a young Frenchman appeared afterwards. It was the first time that Arnold had heard Miss Wilton speak French, and he thought it the most charming and thoroughly civilized tongue of the world. The Frenchman was laughing over the cautious way in which she criticised an acquaintance of his.

"With no one else has he even tried to talk," he said. "You have done wonders, Mademoiselle."

"I will admit, then, that I found it uphill work. Yet I am told that his family is good."

De Brion shrugged his shoulders.

"Let us hope his family is small. But I believe he has nine brothers."

Later Seton arrived, and when Robertson came towards Miss Wilton again, he found himself again a listener. Seton had made some complaint, to which Lilla replied, —

"It was you who went away, not I who sent you."

"You must pardon me. I charge more smiles for my society than some men do."

"Yes, I must beware; you have driven Miss Goldthwait into insolvency."

"My wits are slow, Miss Wilton. That remark must be explained to me."

"To begin with, your conversation is expensive for one of moderate resources," said Lilla, re-casting her accusation very cleverly.

"Ah, well," said Seton flattered, "ladies have always the gold of kindness with which to repay the baser coin of wit."

"The standard is high this evening," thought Robertson. "I think I 'll not say anything." But Seton did not leave him to himself.

"Here is our manager," he said, "who has n't time for our rehearsals. I hope we are to see you at the play itself."

"I am sorry to say that there is a doubt even about that," said Arnold. "I have some vexatious business in the courts at Hartford, and it will probably be on the docket this very next week."

"Why, this is flat perjury."

Seton went on with his reproaches, and Arnold presently excused himself and went to talk with Miss Goldthwait. Before leaving, however, he contrived to find Miss Wilton alone.

"Do you ride at all?" he asked.

"No, I don't. You are very fond of it, I believe."

"I go out rather often. The maples in the park are beginning to show 'belief,' as I believe Lowell puts it. I wish you did ride, and that we could have that chance of a leisurely conversation."

"I wish I did too. I 'm afraid I 'm a coward."

"You like driving, though?"

"Oh, yes."

"Will you get Mrs. Meredith to drive you out?

I can leave my horse, and we can take a walk together."

"Mrs. Meredith is busy now about the theatricals," said Lilla, with a slight color in her cheeks. "I don't believe she could take me."

"She could send you."

"I ought to help her."

Robertson was ill-pleased with the answer, and stood in silence, while Miss Wilton looked at him in most sincere astonishment and perplexity. He had asked her to do what he would not have been willing she should do for any one else.

"You are not to be at the play," she said, at last, in low and very reproachful tones.

"No, probably not."

"But you will go on the coach-drive?"

"I can't tell yet."

"That would be a good chance for a talk."

"Yes, in the charming seclusion of a picnic, or on the coach over Stanton's shoulder."

"Is the seating my fault?" asked Lilla in a very dangerously soft voice.

"I can't say, I 'm sure."

Lilla began to laugh.

"You are certainly very bad to-night. What has made you so cross?"

Arnold looked at her a few moments, and then said in a softer voice, —

"I suppose I have no right to complain. Perhaps on the contrary I have given *you* cause by suggesting a walk in the park. I don't know what is correct and what is n't. I simply know that for days I

have been wishing to see you in a quiet and sensible fashion, and for days I have n't had a chance; and you apparently don't care to give me a chance."

"Well, I am now in a relenting mood, and will see you to-morrow afternoon, if you do not prefer to ride. You may come about four o'clock, and I will see no one else. Will this suit Monseigneur?"

"Ah, talk French to me, do. I had not the least idea that an American ever could talk French as you do."

His face had cleared completely, and he lingered near her for the rest of the evening.

CHAPTER VII.

A STRANGE feeling overhung Lilla's mind as she awoke the next morning. It was not unlike regret. Regret over what? She would not think the matter out. But happening to see her face in the mirror as she was dressing, she stopped short.

"I 'd like to be rid of you," she said to herself. "I 'd like to be some one different for the next twenty-four hours."

No sooner had she said this than she resented it. What had she done? She had always been very cautious, and had got into very little trouble for a woman of her age and attractiveness. She was not afraid of comparing herself with any woman she knew, nor would she be afraid of meeting this invisible cousin of Mr. Robertson's, Edith Monroe. It was Miss Monroe who avoided the meeting. She was doubtless afraid.

"I wonder if it would be possible," she said to herself again, as she went into her sitting-room where her letters and her coffee were brought, "to love a man so much that you would never let him see you again. I don't remember any such case."

Her letters were waiting for her, and at the sight of one, a very disagreeable look crossed her face. She tore it open, and just as she unfolded it Elsa glided behind her with the newspaper. Lilla started

violently, and turned on her a look from which the girl shrank, horrified.

"Indeed, Mademoiselle, I was not looking," she murmured.

Lilla, ashamed, took up her letter again and read it quietly, and when Elsa brought the coffee she addressed some cheerful words to her; but poor Elsa, who had now other memories to join with this, though never before had she seen Miss Wilton's distrust of her so clearly expressed, retired to her work in a maze of bitter and sorrowful reflections. The mind at times acts strangely like the body. It would seem that the date of an injury should matter nothing to it; whereas, it feels acutely for a time in spite of reasonings, and then recovers with equal disregard of them.

After breakfast Lilla made ready to go out.

"I am going shopping," she said.

She took the horse-car down town, even below Eighth Street. To what shop was she going? She turned eastward and paused at a shabby door on a narrow street. When she pushed it open, a dark staircase was visible. Lilla waited for a moment to summon her courage, then with resolute lips went forward. She exchanged words with a cabinet-maker who worked on the second story.

This was a man who had done work for her, and who had now allowed her to use his rooms for an appointment.

"The gentleman has n't come yet," he said politely. "Won't you walk in this room? It won't be needed."

He followed her in, and added in a changed tone:

"The dirty rascal has been trying to find out how much you owe me, but he is none the wiser for his impudence. I shall be within call, and if you happen to want his head punched, I 'll do it cheap."

"Thank you, Mr. Jenkins," said Lilla. "How much do I owe you now?"

"A matter of one hundred and fifty dollars, Miss, counting in this last job. I don't mind calling it one hundred and twenty-five, if it is paid this month."

Miss Wilton winced. "I would rather pay you in full. You have done everything so well. But I hear some one on the stairs," she continued, beginning to tremble in spite of herself. "You had better go."

The man who came in as Jenkins left was Schreitenberger, the hotel clerk from Vienna. He was not as repulsive as the term "dirty rascal" suggested. His linen was scrupulously clean, his hair well brushed, and his seal ring called attention to a hand by no means uncared-for. But to Lilla he was unclean. His retreating forehead and evasive eyes, his clothes, his manner, inspired her with ungovernable detestation, and she thought she could never again look at a seal ring with complacency. She had seen him once since their first meeting, for, impatient at her delay, he had forced his way to her presence in her own apartment, and had so alarmed her that she had given him money to defer the interview. Now she meant to end the matter entirely. He placed a chair for her, and she reluctantly took

it, because she could better steady her hand while sitting.

"You have your receipt made out, I suppose."

"It seems to me," said Schreitenberger, looking at her with an unpleasant smile, "that you gave me a good deal of unnecessary trouble the last time we met."

"I came to put through a piece of business, and will not discuss anything else."

"I must be paid for my time and trouble, I suppose."

"I will stand no blackmail. The bill was two hundred and forty florins; you said so yourself."

"It was five hundred and forty."

"It was not. The bill was for less than three weeks. I will call it a hundred dollars."

Schreitenberger laughed sneeringly.

"How about expenses of collection! It 's not a question of a hotel bill now. It 's a question of your good name and your fine friends. The receipt will be for two hundred and forty florins and thirty-five kreutzers, and for this little autograph you will pay me five hundred dollars."

"If I were rich and could do this," said Lilla steadily, "you might ask it. It does not the slightest good to ask it when I have n't the money."

"Jewels, furs, dresses, — you 've got everything. Friends, too; they ought to be good for something."

"Listen to me, you scoundrel!"

"Softly, softly, my dear."

"I shall say what I like. There is a limit to what I am willing to do. You have no witnesses."

"You have the same maid still."

Lilla winced. She knew that, and Elsa was contemptibly truthful.

"Well, the whole matter is this. I have two hundred dollars with me, neither more nor less. I am willing to give you that for this hotel receipt. I will not in any way give you a cent more."

"It 's absurd."

"Then I leave you."

"And I will follow you."

"You may do so till you get arrested. I tell you it is n't worth more to me. Go ahead and do as you like. This is your last chance of the two hundred, for soon I won't have that. I have too many calls for money."

Schreitenberger looked a moment at her face, which was set and dogged. He sat down at a table and drew a receipt from his pocket. It was made out for the hotel, dated back, and receipted by himself as clerk.

"Let 's see the money," he said.

Miss Wilton took the receipt and, laying it on one side, drew the bills from a bag that hung from her side. She counted it over to him, but she could hardly see to do so, and her hand shook. To her surprise he had hardly touched the money when he started to leave. He stumbled against her in doing so, almost as if drunk. Lilla stepped out of his way, and with a sigh of relief heard him go rapidly down the stairs.

Then she called in Mr. Jenkins.

"I find," she said, "that I can pay a hundred dol-

lars on my account. Will you give me a receipt and help me to find a carriage? I don't feel at all well."

Jenkins was struck by her pallor, and willingly put himself at her service. His deference was inexpressibly soothing. It seemed to reinstate her in her rightful social superiority. As she turned to leave, she looked for the hotel receipt. It was nowhere to be found. Schreitenberger had not been awkward and bungling for nothing.

Elsa was destined to more trouble of mind that day, for Miss Wilton had a headache and seemed really suffering, yet nothing that she could do was well received. She gave up the effort to please and sat sewing in her room. Early in the afternoon Miss Wilton's bell rang.

"I am expecting some one to see me at four o'clock," she said. "A gentleman," she added with some hesitation. "After that I shall be engaged to any one else. You can come in at half past three and help me dress."

It lacked fully fifteen minutes to four when the door-bell rang.

"He has come?" asked Miss Wilton, as Elsa returned.

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

Miss Wilton was almost ready.

"You can go," she said. "I want to be alone a moment. Remember, now, I am engaged, to any one else."

She stood looking steadily at herself in the mirror. A smile was on her face, and indeed the picture was not one to raise dissatisfaction.

"He says he prefers black," she said, "but I think I know better."

She paused a moment more and drew a long breath. Then, taking a jar of roses in both hands, she passed into her sitting-room.

As she entered, her smile faded. What bad omen was this? It was Gardiner who rose to meet her.

Lilla carried the roses across the room and set them down; then replying to his greeting, she said,

"Excuse me for one moment more."

When she returned again she remarked, —

"You will not find me entertaining. I have a bad headache."

"Perhaps you ought not to see me at all," said Gardiner with quick anxiety.

"I almost think so myself."

"I will stay but a moment, then; long enough to say that your acting was far above my expectations."

"You are very kind."

"I suppose you are feeling the reaction. You throw yourself so wonderfully into the part. One really has an illusion of reality, which is seldom the case on the amateur stage. But I do think you would be glad to have me go."

Lilla said nothing, and Gardiner rose.

"If I may, I will come in on Sunday."

He was about to offer his hand, when the bell rang, and in a moment was heard the sound of a man's voice, then Elsa asking him to come in. Gardiner drew himself up and waited, but no one entered. Lilla turned to the jar of roses, and pulling out a few came towards him.

"Will you have a rose or two?"

Their eyes met, and she turned back again and replaced them.

"They are handsome roses," said Gardiner. "I think the same kind that Creighton wore the other night at a champagne supper. Do you happen to know? I believe he had come from you."

He waited a moment and held out his hand in farewell. Lilla did not move.

"Will you think it over and see if you can forgive me?" continued Gardiner. "I may be biased in my own direction, but I think if I had been favored with such roses as he wore that night, I should have made a better use of them than he did."

He was about to leave, when Lilla interposed.

"Is it asking too much, Mr. Gardiner, to beg you not to call again till you have a more favorable opinion of me?"

Gardiner stopped short in dismay.

"Be a little forgiving," he said after a pause. "It is because I have your welfare at heart that I spoke. Some men would not care. Or," he continued, as Lilla said nothing, "if you will but tell me I was mistaken, I will take your word against the world's."

"You are asking what you have no right to ask."

"I suppose so. Now listen, Miss Wilton." He went hastily to the table. "Here is the rose I have just refused. You know whether I want it or not from you, and why I refused it. Will you look me in the eyes and offer it to me again?"

"I will do nothing so melodramatic."

"Then you intend not to see me again."

"Since you will have it so."

Gardiner's face became suddenly flushed. For a moment he stood facing her; then he made her a low bow.

"I wish you a very good day."

As the door closed, Miss Wilton rang her bell.

"Light the fire, Elsa," she said, "and now ask Mr. Robertson to come in."

Her hands were cold and her face very pale as she turned towards him. The day had not been one to fit her to enjoy his visit. Arnold noticed her pallor at once, but she disavowed being ill.

"I have had a fatiguing day," she said, "and the afternoon has turned suddenly chilly."

She allowed him to establish her in an easy-chair near the fire, and to put a shawl over her shoulders. Certainly nothing could have pleased him better than to find her needing his care.

He talked to her of the play and the tributes he had heard to her acting.

"I cannot see any way of being here on the great day," he said regretfully. "Of course, the court does not sit in the evening, but I must see several men between the sessions. I should not have allowed myself to miss the rehearsal, if I had thought I must lose the play. But I do think I can be here in time for the drive the next day, and I hope to bring Miss Monroe with me. I want so much to have you meet her. Still, I wanted to see you act."

"I don't suppose I act well," said Lilla. "This play comes easy to me, however."

"Mr. Seton has been telling me what a remarkably high-minded play it is. I don't like to miss a taste of such air, from the upper table-lands of human nature. Plays usually call in question the very essentials of human character, — purity and honesty; and presuppose selfishness to be peculiarly human. Miss Lynton is blessed, I hear, with a true womanly indifference to worldly considerations."

"As compared to other things. She has found a man whom she loves."

"Yes, as compared to love. True love! Do you know, Miss Wilton, I doubt if I ever know what that sentiment is; in the accepted sense, I mean. It seems so cheap and personal. I was telling you the other day of some of the conditions of life among those whom the Bible chooses to consider our brothers and sisters. If one follows this clue but a very little way, it makes most of the interests of our lives shadowy and unreal, not to say heartless. True love shares much the same fate. Just think of it; — human researches, human attainments, human skill, have become the interests of a class, while humanity itself lies helpless under the wheels of the industrial Juggernaut car. Many philanthropists come to me for money, but what is it for? to follow meekly this car with oil and wine for the mutilated victims, or rather, for a small proportion of them; and to run ahead of it preaching sobriety, frugality, and patience, or a change of heart. It occurs to but few to change the industrial machine itself into something that does not send the able-bodied by slow steps into our almshouses and hospitals, and lay hold

on all that is weak down to the helplessness of little children in order to get what little they can give. And Juggernaut, while doing this, often leaves the strong idle. There is nothing for him to do. 'Out of work,' — the most pitiful cry of the age. Why is it that with his wife in rags and his children starving, there is nothing for a man to do? Why? Because the markets are full, and the storehouses of the world are for the time being plentifully supplied. That is the reason why his family must go hungry."

Lilla was a good deal disappointed at this very serious turn to the conversation. She could not at once bring herself to confront the problems of the industrial world. Robertson caught her look, and in spite of himself a smile broke over his face. But he soon grew sober again, and said with the fine bitterness of a young man, —

"These things have become very real to me, but I suppose I must apologize for even mentioning them in your presence."

"Indeed, no," said Lilla earnestly and she added with all the gravity he could wish, —

"What can you do?"

"I am glad to say men are doing for themselves. What can *I* do? I don't know yet. I don't suppose that health and education and money and leisure are absolute disqualifications."

He sat for a few moments in silence.

"You do care, I know, Miss Wilton, that mere existence should come so hard to so many."

Lilla assented very gravely, her mind traveling

back to her own wretched morning with Schreitenberger; but she added immediately, "I think, though, that there is plenty of room in the world to be happy."

She did not look towards him, but rose and went to the table, where Elsa had placed a tea-tray; here she began to make tea, while Robertson watched her movements as if listening to music.

"I wish you would tell me," she said a little defiantly, "why you looked so very sober at Mrs. Meredith's, just because I said some one was vulgar."

"Because I thought the word did not belong in your vocabulary."

"There *are* vulgar people, you can't deny that."

"But I do deny it, — in your use of the word. Why be so scornful? What is there so wrong about vulgarity, — commonness, that is? If you are careful to take from it the touch of immorality which so often clings to it, — if you take simple vulgarity, it has its uses, its pleasures, its wholesomeness, just like any good, clean dirt. Do you think of the round earth as a great mass of uncleanness? No, it is dirt. Your own face being clean, the world is clean. So I think to any one like you, so different from others, so simple, so exquisite, the whole world of people should seem different from what it does to others. Commonness to you should seem beautiful and full of variety. You, who are able to make so many common things seem divine, why should you draw the line at anything? Why not go on like the sunlight, and find the beauty of everything?"

"I am afraid I don't know how."

"Be simple, and true to yourself, and don't echo other people's prejudices."

"But, Mr. Robertson, I can be true to myself and yet dislike a great many people."

"Then perhaps you have still much to learn. Perhaps our æstheticism and our Americanism must both be quickened by our Christianity, before they are made perfect. Think what we have it in our power to do for those we dislike. Those who are seeking us out, who are covertly watching and imitating us, these people we fly from in hot haste, and devote ourselves to elevating the lower classes. We make an excuse for ourselves out of their insincerity and lack of genuineness; as if it were easy to be sincere at the mercy of shifting ideals, when one blushes for the old before one has quite understood the new. One might do more here with one's little finger than by years of effort elsewhere, and up and down society would become a continuous web, each part knit firmly to the next."

"I think, Mr. Robertson, it *is* Christianity that you are talking, and one of a particularly hard kind."

It was a great pleasure to Arnold to hear her speak of Christianity so soberly and reverently. Indeed, the whole afternoon was exceptional in his experience of her ways, and it gave him acute pain afterwards to hear from Seton that she had danced that night till three o'clock. He had no theories against dancing, and he tried to reason away his disagreeable impression. He questioned Seton further.

"I was n't there myself. I heard this from an-

other fellow. He says they had a mighty nice time, and some of them found it difficult to get home."

"Miss Wilton enjoyed herself, I suppose."

"She did indeed. She told her partner that life was a burden till the gas was lit."

"That 's a hopeful sentiment for a young woman, is n't it? "

"There are moments, Arnold, when I think that Miss Wilton is not wholly unsophisticated; that possibly the thought of what I approve or disapprove is not the guiding-star of her existence. I shall need more evidence before making this assertion absolutely, but the idea has occurred to me. Stanton was once complimenting her on her talent for conversing, and she said her only talent was in listening, or at least, in pretending to listen, but she adored dancing. I think that is a tolerably accurate statement."

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE evening, a little before dusk, Edith Monroe went to her mother's room, and for a time sat in silence while her mother was knitting.

"Is Uncle Burton at home now?" she asked at last.

"Yes, I believe so."

"Do you think he would like to have us stay with him?"

"Do you wish to visit in Philadelphia?"

"I want to live there. I am tired of New York."

"He would ask nothing better," said Mrs. Monroe, and then she fell into a long silence. She was not blind to her daughter's feelings, but she dreaded this change for her. After some moments she laid down her knitting.

"You must not be rash, Edith."

Edith drew a long breath, but said nothing.

"Arnold is very different from some men, and he is still very young. There is far more folded away in young people than has ever blossomed to the light. One must give them time. And he is a very original man. He — is worth waiting for."

Edith's face glowed; partly, however, with pleasure at the compliment.

"Forgive me for speaking, dear, but I must. I remember how surprised I was when your father told

me he cared for me. I so little expected it, that I would have taken no one's word for it but his own. Neither can you, I know; only do nothing rash."

There was another pause, during which Edith gently caressed her mother's hand.

"I don't mean that we should leave at once, mother. But perhaps you will write something about it to Uncle Burton. If I must leave, why then I must."

She rose to slip away, and her mother, after detaining her for a kiss, sat thinking with increasing sadness.

"My poor, poor girl," she said softly. "I fear this is a suffering she cannot leave behind her."

Gradually, Mrs. Monroe yielded to her daughter's wishes and privately came to an understanding with her brother in Philadelphia. She could not, however, look forward to the change with any courage, and she watched daily for some turn in affairs which would make it unnecessary. She thought that Edith exaggerated Miss Wilton's influence. Arnold could hardly fall into a serious entanglement with a woman of whom so little was knqwn and yet so much was said. She was tempted to appeal to Edith's pride not to yield to such a rivalry; really the child was too meek-spirited. This temptation presented itself in full force when in early April Seton arranged in Miss Wilton's honor an excursion by coach into the country, and Edith announced immediately her intention of declining the invitation sent to her.

"Don't decide offhand in that way," said Mrs.

Monroe, displeased. "I am not at all sure that you ought not to go."

"You, too, mother," said Edith, smiling. "Arnold is waiting in the library to give me a lecture on this very subject."

"I think we owe something to him, Edith. If, as I hear, he often sees this Miss Wilton, we ought not to refuse to know her. I consider Arnold as a nephew, and I wish to do all I can for him. I am myself too much of an invalid to go into society and meet his friends, and you must do it for me. If a young man's acquaintances are unworthy of his family, it is well to put the contrast before him vividly, before he becomes too much involved."

"I fear I don't feel my responsibility for Arnold as seriously as you do."

"You have more reason; he thinks more of your opinion."

"He does n't ask it."

"Not in words, perhaps; but in every other way. It is touching, really, Edith, to see how he watches your words. You deliberately blind yourself to it. All winter he has wanted you to meet her; really a flattering tribute, when you come to think of it. He wants to see her in your presence. I don't suppose you are afraid of that test. She is said to be beautiful. In this nineteenth century, and for a man like Arnold, beauty is too much a matter of breeding and spirit for you to fear such a comparison. Really, Edith," concluded Mrs. Monroe, her color heightening at her own plain speaking, "to accept defeat beforehand is to deserve it."

Edith gazed at her mother in unfeigned amazement at this novel line of attack. Her lips moved painfully, but no words came from them.

"I speak for Arnold's sake, too, dear child. I suppose he is as likely as another man to make a serious mistake, involving his lifelong happiness. We certainly should be willing to do our part. We are relatives, — well, close connections at least, — and he is comparatively alone in the world. Give all this due consideration, dear, and especially notice how he watches all your words and actions. Don't lose anything through faint-heartedness."

"Ah, mother," cried out Edith, "do you think you notice more closely than I do, or can know half as much?"

"I do, really. A third party is unprejudiced. Trust me for something, dear. Put on a good heart, and face this unseen beauty. See her once at least, before running away from her."

Edith rose slowly.

"Thank you, dear," she said patiently; "thank you for trying to help me. Arnold is waiting, you know. Perhaps I had better go to him now."

"At least," said her mother anxiously, "don't commit yourself yet about going to Philadelphia."

"I shall say nothing," said Edith with a faint smile.

The library was a large room, occupying the rear of the second floor, lined with books to the ceiling, and encircled with a light iron gallery. It had been the favorite retreat of the late Mr. Robertson, and here Arnold was sitting by the fire, which, with the

lamp near by, lighted but a small portion of the room. He was watching for her, and seemed relieved when she at last appeared. Edith looked about the room, as she took her seat.

"What a pretty half-light you have here! I think this is the dearest room in the world. Do you remember what an honor it was when we children were allowed to come into it? And now we are the elders, whose right there is none to dispute, — unless, indeed, you choose to dispute mine."

"No, I assure you," said Robertson. "Solitude has been without charms for the last half hour at least."

"I believe you wish to scold me, Arnold."

Robertson smiled gently.

"For your own good, as they say."

"There is never any other reason, of course."

Arnold hesitated.

"I do want to ask you to reconsider your decision; for Seton's sake, to begin with. He gets very little favor from you, which is pretty hard on so good a friend of mine. Then you don't go about with me at all nowadays. It 's weeks since we have been out together. This is wholly different from a ball or a tea-fight. This is a country excursion, such as we used to have in the saddle, and the party are all friends of mine. I am really ashamed not to have you know them all. One who did not know my little cousin might really come to think her some haughty, aristocratic person, who could not be approached."

"She is," said Edith, throwing back her pretty head.

"Do talk frankly to me, Edith. We have been so long at cross-purposes."

"The last time it was I who wished your company, and you who refused."

"There was a special reason, you remember, — I had some business."

"Business," broke out Edith, "I wish it were business. I think a little active business would keep you out of a great deal of mischief."

Robertson laughed outright at this sudden attack, and the clever change of subject.

"I am in earnest," continued Edith. "I have thought it out seriously, and, of course, there is much to be said for your view of it. Suffering must be relieved, of course, and children must be taught, but one does hear so dismally much about it. I don't suppose that a third of the human race is reduced to pauperism, yet seven eighths of the conversation I hear is either on this interesting topic or overshadowed by it. Minnie lives, apparently, through her church work, in a world of sordid economies and most painful family incidents. She gets all their troubles, and they none of her pleasures. In fact, she has no pleasures of a kind one can share. If I were starving ever so much, I 'd be glad to have somebody have a good time. You must deal with realities, Arnold. They are always cheerful. I don't mean that you must try to make money, but do some work for that part of humanity to which one does n't have to condescend. The world is not yet so abject that you are forced to throw yourself away on it; — certainly not in America, at least."

Arnold rose, and leaning on the mantelpiece looked at her in surprise. Apparently she had struck some thought that impressed him. At last he said tentatively, —

"One might perhaps turn away from some other man's suffering and let him bear it alone, if — if there were no injustice behind it."

"Ah, then find that out. That would be worthy of you. Make the laws more just. But I do so hate to see you take up charitable work. Incidentally, you might. A gentleman may stop to open a shop-door for a lady, but he won't plant himself there to do a work, worth, after all, no more than a porter's pay. I have thought it all out, Arnold, very seriously, and I see it more clearly than I can tell it to you. I am not asking you to leave details to others, only to cover a larger field yourself. I want you to take up work that is more real, that lasts, and is satisfactory in the doing. I don't have as much pity for human suffering as most people have. Supposing this generation does suffer; it lives only seventy years. You must n't in the least throw yourself away on it. You don't love others as you do yourself, if you think their physical wants are the greatest. What the world needs is you at your best, at your happiest.

"Oh, Arnold," went on Edith, with sudden emotion, "you are worth so much more than I or any woman. You can't know what a comfort it is to me to know any one so much better than I. You know your own way, too, only I must tell you not to waste yourself. It 's the only lesson you need to be

told, and you will remember it now. I should like to come here ten years hence and see you with a wife and children worthy of you and doing work worthy of you. It is the only thing I do care about."

Edith caught herself and stopped short. The last sentence had burst from her lips with unmistakable pathos and sincerity. Robertson was moved, and showed it by his silence. Edith sat looking into the fire, trying to keep down the tide of bitter tears which her own frankness had brought so near.

"You have always been more than a sister to me, Edith, and I always remember all you say to me. It appears to me, however, that we have drifted far from the point at which we started. But leaving that out of the question for the moment, I want to ask you if Minnie was right in saying that you and Aunt Annie were planning a trip to Philadelphia. I had heard nothing of it."

"Yes, we were thinking of it," said Edith in a low voice. "Mother is n't as well as at this time last year. I want her to leave New York early."

"Don't worry about her, dear Edith."

Arnold had caught sight of Edith's tear-filled eyes and now bent forward to take her hands. At the touch her self-control came to an end, and to his intense dismay she burst into a storm of sobs and hot tears. Robertson did his best to quiet her, caressing her hands, and assuring her that neither he nor Minnie had seen any cause for alarm, and that she had become altogether too watchful and nervous. She heard his words, evidently, through her weeping, and was grateful, but she could not at once control

herself. After some moments, however, she lay passive in her chair, with but an occasional shudder.

"You are over-tired, dear. It may do you good yourself to have a rest. I see no great change in Aunt Annie, though her neuralgia is certainly troublesome. You are not hiding any special reason for worry?"

"Oh, no. I am tired, perhaps. This has done me good. Don't tell Minnie what a baby I am, will you, dear Arnold?"

"Of course not. Poor Minnie! When we were small, we always kept our secrets from her, did n't we? They would have been good for nothing without her to keep them from. What a curious little ring! Why, it 's the ring I gave you while I was at college, is n't it? Where have you fished that out from? And you can wear it still? It 's a sweet little hand. I love it dearly. Now I 'll tell you what we will do, Edith. I must be at Hartford every Wednesday for a few weeks. When I get through with that, I will take you on to Philadelphia, and then I 'll go on for you again. Or, if you like, we 'll go further, and take Aunt Annie to Fortress Monroe, or to whatever place the doctor recommends."

Edith listened to his caressing talk with but little response. She took some pleasure in his brotherly sympathy, in the fact that this anxiety and effort to comfort were all for her and for no one else. Gradually she grew more quiet and composed, and at last asked, as he paused, —

"Do you go to Hartford this next Wednesday?"

"Yes; or rather, I go on Tuesday, and may be gone two nights. Seton wants me rather early on Thursday, I believe, for his coaching party."

"Shall you care very much if I don't go to that, dear Arnold? I somehow don't feel in the least like it."

"Well, I can't help caring," said Arnold, looking at her a little strangely.

"I should like to please you."

"Then let me tell Bob that if you feel equal to it you may go, even at the last moment."

"If he wants such an answer as that, I am willing."

"He does; he is very anxious not to lose you."

When the two cousins at last separated for the night, Edith asked to be left behind in the library for a few minutes.

"It is so cosy here in the dear old room, and the fire is all the company I want. I will attend to the lights and everything."

Arnold left her; she rose and gazed for a moment about the shadowy room, then pushed her chair nearer to the fire and fell into wondering thought.

"When we are children, we are always so much cared for," she said to herself. "I suppose my mother thought a great deal of what I should become in future years. We are all alike then. Our teachers teach us, and everybody is interested in us, and agrees to believe that some great good will, of course, result from all this care and training. They do it from instinct, and I 'm glad they do, for the sake of the poor children. But when we 're done, there

is no use for us. Who cares about that? They go on and train up the next generation. Every one loves children. I wish some one loved them afterwards. One's mother does, of course; but it is in a pitying, pathetic way, as much as to say, 'Do you still look to me?' Uncle Robertson used to be so good to me when I was small. I wonder if he would have been so still. I think he would. Sometimes he pitied me when I saw no reason for it. I would come and tell him sometimes when I thought the other children were not fair, and he would say, 'Poor little Edith!' and stroke my hair. Then he would say it when I was all right again, and that I did not not understand. 'Poor little Edith!' I wish some one would say it now. I can't pity myself. I can't think. I am stupid. I am going away forever from my home, my only home, and I don't cry. I don't pity myself. I pity my poor mother who loves me. I pity Arnold. I pity every one who has to take me into account.

"Well, there is one thing I am too wise to do. Whatever my mother says, I will not enter on that miserable path and try to make love where there is none. Thank God, I am not a wife to need to undertake such torture as that."

Edith remained in these reveries till the fire was low and the room grew cold. Then at last she rose and went quietly to bed.

Robertson's engagements in Hartford left him free much of Wednesday, and so seriously had certain thoughts begun to weigh on him that he preferred to spend his leisure in his room at the hotel. In this

brief withdrawal from his usual conditions of life, he had been brought face to face with his own thoughts, and forced to the uneasy conviction that he had changed much of late and was still changing. All through his recent talk with Edith he had felt a lack in himself, and had dreaded lest she should discover it too. Fortunately, she had not cared to appeal to anything deeper than the brotherly faithfulness always at her service; and this had proved to him, what otherwise would have been incredible, that she had not in former times understood his real attitude. Only love perceives love, and this it may do without word or glance. Like an electric flash, this last suggestion passed through his heart, and in a moment was followed by the bitterest shame.

Was this, then, the hidden cause? the faint beginnings of another love? Not for a nobler woman either; simply a new love, untested, unexplored, its whole attraction lying in its wonderful freshness and strangeness. It was not true. He felt degraded at the thought. He recalled the many theories he had formed of late; — of Edith's inability to understand him, of her incapacity for a real love of humanity, of her irreligion even (so far had he carried his hostile criticism, with a bigotry which no innocence could have withstood); and all this had one simple, far too simple reason. It was disgusting; he would have nothing to do with it.

From its other side Arnold was unwilling to look at the matter. To think of it at all was to exaggerate it. The purer and sweeter a woman was, the worse a crime was it to bring her an homage tainted

by selfishness and self-deception. This it would be, for, in spite of his present vigorous denials, he had had some love, at least, for another woman; and, whether or not he had now found some one wiser, more devoted, more unselfish than Edith, he could not honestly say that it was for such reasons that he had changed. He had not changed, he had been changed; transferred like a puppet to a new stage. Fortunately, it was as yet within his power to refuse to play his new part. Even were it true, which he denied, that all his thoughts toward Edith were those of apology, and that all his spontaneous thoughts had another object, this new stirring of life was not an unusual or unmanageable matter. Such things come and go in a young man's life, with no more blame to him than a rosebush may deserve for bearing more than one rose in a summer. The wrong would not come till he dared to speak of love to a woman whom he did not honor with all his heart.

Thursday morning Robertson returned to New York and, anxious that Edith should enjoy the lovely day in the country, hastened home to insure her going with him on the drive. This at last was a true spring day. Seton was most fortunate. The air was soft and exhilarating. Miss Wilton had been longing for such a day, and would expand under it like a spring blossom. Ah, it was a happy thing to live! What gaslight revelry could compare with this morning's purity and ecstasy, and what a divine and simple morality it was never to sacrifice a greater pleasure to a lesser!

He entered his home with a latch-key and ran upstairs to Mrs. Monroe's door. Hearing no answer to his knock, he went up another flight to Edith's room. Here he was equally unsuccessful, and coming down the stairs again, he met Minnie.

"Is every one out, this lovely morning?" he asked after greeting her.

Minnie looked at him.

"They have taken the train for Philadelphia this morning."

"What!" said Robertson, blankly.

"Yes," said Minnie, and Arnold saw for the first time her look of grief, — marks of tears, even. "It will be lonely enough now for us. Three of us in this house and Philip home only in vacations."

"They will not be gone more than a fortnight at the most," said Arnold, alarmed.

His sister was silent.

"Minnie, tell me what it means. Have we done anything to hurt their feelings? Or is Aunt Annie really more ill?"

"I think she is much the same. Every year she fails a little. No, they don't seem at all hurt, but they both insist on making the change. There is a note in the library for you. Perhaps that will explain better than I can."

Robertson turned to go, and then stopped.

"Tell me first, Minnie, how you understand it. How long do they mean to stay away?"

"Indefinitely."

Their eyes met and Arnold withdrew his uneasily. In the library he found a brief note from Edith: —

I am sorry, dear Arnold, to leave in your absence, but it seems best to improve this good day. The expressman is to call for our trunks during the day. Mrs. Ainslie is to have them marked. I shall not forget our talk the other night, and your dear sympathy about mother. She looks bright this morning, and anticipates seeing so many old friends. She says, "Give my love and good-bye to my dear boy." I may say the same. EDITH.

Robertson dropped the note on the table and gazed speechlessly at it. It said little, and yet, now that his eyes were opened, it said more than he had before believed, what once he had scarcely dared to hope. What carried conviction, he could hardly tell. Conviction seemed to come first and proofs afterwards; plentifully scattered now over all the short winter they had spent together. Love itself, in its ordinary acceptation, seemed faint and pale before this true affection, this unselfish care for all that was best in him. But a few days ago she had said that the only thing she cared for was to see him with work suited to him, and wife and children worthy of him. Does a man ever love with such unselfishness? What fearful irony is in life that, with perfect self-approval, he should have been bitterly criticising her thoughts and faith at the very time when her heart was beating with such tenderness and struggling towards such self-abnegation.

"Ah, Edith," he cried, "I must follow you. We men are not worthy of the first touch of softness in a woman's heart. It is divine, and we are but human."

To follow her! The way indeed was open to him. Her challenge was a fair one. If I am mistaking the situation, come and tell me so. If not, "my love and good-bye to my dear boy."

At one o'clock Minnie came to the library door.

"Lunch is ready, Arnold, and you have an engagement, have you not?"

Robertson started to his feet, and she saw his face. The sight startled her from that mood of criticism which, unacceptable as it was on both sides, often subsisted between the brother and sister, and for the last few months had been especially marked. She moved nearer to him, but could not tell what to say.

"I must go and find Seton," said Arnold. "I can't go with him. I must let him know at once. I believe they are all breakfasting at Mrs. Meredith's."

About forty minutes later, Mrs. Meredith and a few guests were rising from lunch. They passed into the drawing-room, where — so mild was the day — the windows were thrown open, and a small sparrow looked in from the balcony. Miss Wilton went quickly forward to the window, followed by her hostess.

"I suppose," said Lilla, "that Mr. Seton knows how to drive. I have never heard him speak of horses, and now he is attempting a four-in-hand. I hope he is n't sacrificing too much to his politeness."

"A coachful of ladies would be too much, I 'm sure," returned Mrs. Meredith. "Oh, no, he has driven a good deal. He always takes some one with

him to talk racing and stable matters, — Mr. Stanton has the rôle to-day, — and this with his gloves and gorgeous silk handkerchief transforms the world for him. I beg of you, have some notable patch of color in your own array; you could not please him better. Mr. Seton was called out just now. I hope nothing is wrong with the horses."

Mrs. Meredith turned to another guest, and Lilla presently heard her name called, and saw Seton in the doorway.

"Will you be so kind as to come this way? I have a recalcitrant here. As in the old fable, wind has no effect on him, and now we must try sunshine."

Lilla followed him, and found Arnold Robertson standing in the hall, with a mien wholly out of keeping with the spring day or the joyous occasion.

"Now, Miss Wilton, argue with him. He pretends to say that he is n't going with us."

"If he can withstand the argument of this spring day, I do not know what to add."

"*He* does n't look at weather. He has on overcoat and muffler now, and evidently thinks it 's February. It is, at the corners of his mouth. Tell him that the spring has come, that you will take him out to pick violets, that of all the glad new year it is the maddest, merriest day, and then, if he won't go, make him give his exquisite reason therefor."

"Now, Mr. Seton, you only frighten him. You will make him cry. Treat him kindly. Get him a glass of punch, and give him time."

"Give you place, you mean. I will. I 'll be

back in exactly two minutes to assist at your triumph."

Lilla waited till Seton was out of hearing, and then said in a changed voice: —

"You must forgive us our foolishness. This beautiful day makes us perfectly childish. Is it really impossible for you to go with us?"

"Yes," replied Robertson with his eyes on the ground.

Miss Wilton looked at him very queerly. He was a comical object in his wintry garb, with the dust of the railroad still on his shoulders. As to his taciturnity, she was accustomed to put a flattering interpretation on such oddities. Her memory passed swiftly over their recent meetings, and she caught her breath with sudden conviction.

"I have no right to ask your reasons," she said under her breath, and then she paused.

Arnold murmured something which sounded like "No, of course not," and then he raised his eyes slowly and looked at her with a troubled, almost hostile scrutiny. What he saw found, apparently, no favor in his eyes. The light left Lilla's face, and she shrank back startled under his unsympathetic gaze.

"Excuse me," she said. "I ought not to interfere at all between you and Mr. Seton, but I was so sorry to think you were not going."

She stood gazing at him, not with her former gayety, but as if trying to understand.

"I am sorry not to go," said Robertson. "It is impossible."

"Then I will leave you," she said slowly, and reëntered the drawing-room.

"A brute again! a brute everywhere!" muttered Arnold to himself. "Luckily, here there is no woman's heart at stake."

Miss Wilton having failed, Seton made no further efforts, and soon Robertson was striding down the street with a somewhat triumphant sense of freedom. He wondered at his own lack of feeling. If she were quick to understand him now, she probably had understood him as well for some weeks past, and her vanity might suffer; not for long, however, with so much to feed it. No, if his conscience troubled him, it was not in that direction. Why had he no thought of going on to Philadelphia? Why, in spite of his many tender thoughts of Edith, did he feel at bottom a grim satisfaction that there was now nothing between himself and the work that was secretly drawing him?

"We men have no real heart," he said to himself, "except for our work, — whatever we choose to make it. Women will never understand that, and for my part I must keep clear of them. I 'll try a new rôle. I 'll be a first-class woman-hater."

CHAPTER IX.

ONE morning in the latter part of April Willcox issued from Mrs. Miller's boarding-house at the early hour of seven and got into a carriage which was waiting for him.

A careful eye would have detected an air of festivity about him, not only in the deep-blue necktie which gleamed cheeringly from the depths of his brown pea-jacket, nor in the stout walking-stick, with which he coquetted with the sidewalk. It was quite as plain in his gait and the twinkle of his eye, and it was reflected from Mrs. Miller's cheerful morning face, as she stood in the doorway. It was even perceptible in the red-faced hackman, who was refolding the blanket he was to sit on, and stamping his feet with suppressed merriment.

"It 's going to be a beautiful day," said Mrs. Miller; "just the day for walking, too; and you shall have a bit of steak and hot griddle-cakes any time you choose to appear this evening."

"My holiday lasts till midnight exactly, Mrs. Miller, so don't get worried if I 'm out till then," was the reply. "Now, then,"— as he stepped in, — "can your horses struggle as far as the Forty-second Street Depot, do you think? "

"Just about," returned the hackman, slamming the door.

"Good-by, Mrs. Miller," called Willcox, leaning out of the window. "I wish you were going too."

A day's holiday out of town was what Willcox had been planning for himself for some time. To walk miles and miles across country in this month of spring's beginnings was his project, and he had fixed upon the rough hills of Walpole, Connecticut, as the most suitable country within easy reach. He had heard Miss Folsom describe that region, for it was there that Miss Granger and she were to spend the early spring months, and it was possible, if he came across Miss Granger's cottage, that he might stop for a few minutes. This would be quite incidental; yet as, after all, it was the only objective point in the day's excursion, he found himself pondering as to whether East or North Walpole would be the nearest station. A Mr. Jackson owned the cottage; it was on the hills north of Walpole; and Miss Folsom, probably in fun, had called it Juniper Hall: these were his only data, so he bought a ticket to North Walpole and then secured a seat and a newspaper.

There is something very pleasant about up-country trains. Willcox had often noticed it in his returns from school to his New Hampshire home. The conductors have usually a very ingenuous expression, the passengers with their kind faces are really a credit to humanity. The popcorn boy, who saunters through the cars, suggests in some recondite way rushing mountain streams hidden by brushwood and glorified by some Indian name, in itself a work of art. There is a fragrance, too, about the smoke

of an early, outward-bound train, like the mist rising from a forest-circled lake. This train in particular was very sympathetic; it screamed with delight at its own speed, as it rushed around curves; and, though it did stop at every way-station, it was because it could not bear to leave any one behind in gloomy towns and cities. When Stamford was announced, Willcox was startled. To have passed through such scenery and have got no further than Stamford was unpardonable. With a laugh at himself, he took up his newspaper.

After the train had left him at North Walpole, he learned that East Walpole, six miles distant, would have been three miles nearer to Miss Granger's cottage. To his surprise, the place was known as Juniper Hall; — New Englanders do not easily let drop any humorous misapplication of the kind. The distance should not have been dispiriting to him, as the country was lovely, even in this flatter portion of the township; but he inquired for a wagon or buggy, and consulted his watch with a rather desperate air for a moment or two.

A man of business habits can hardly do less at a small New England village. His time must be valueless indeed, according to local opinion, if, whether on business or pleasure, he consents to plod on foot through these far-reaching townships. Willcox was keenly sensitive to petty criticism of this sort, and, besides, he did feel an unaccountable sense of impatience. Nothing but an express-wagon could be had, however, and, as it proved, on following this clue, no horse to that. The village hack had gone off to

a funeral. At Jackson's farm, two miles further on the five mile walk before him, he might, perhaps, hire a buggy. So he took to the road vigorously.

It was a perfect day. The sky was intensely blue, the air soft, yet bracing. A gentle wind moved the crisp brown leaves which were still thick upon the oak-trees. The maples were red with buds, and some even showed the tender leaf. The robins and bluebirds were as satisfied as if the trees were already thick with foliage.

The small ponds were scarcely hid by the thick but bare underbrush of beech and acacia, but in the swamps were already patches of the brightest green grass. Indeed, though everything showed promise rather than performance, many would have here found a feast of color that June with its vast, green luxuriance does not equal. The rocks and the hillsides, still wet with morning dew, were endlessly rich in delicate hues. Starting from the deep, rusty tone of the pines and cedars, the scale of color swept through mysteries of warm tint baffling to human speech; in the loving smile of the hillside and the sober realities of rock and earth, lifting man to that wild heaven of simple enjoyment which belongs to him beyond the utmost limits of his reproductive art.

At a bend of the road Willcox came upon a revelation which attracted his attention as the sober landscape had hitherto failed to do. The road was curving through a bit of woods up very steeply to its meeting-line with the sky, and through some open bars at the left, under a large oak-tree, he caught a gleam of purple. They were indeed early violets.

"My stars!" said Willcox.

He flung down his stick, and was soon picking as diligently as a schoolboy.

"That reminds me of what I used to do when it was easier to do it," he said at last, looking at his bunch, which appeared rather insignificant. "I wonder how they can sell them in New York for twenty-five cents a bunch."

When he reached Mr. Jackson's farmhouse, he was told by a woman at the door to go to the barnyard, and there he discovered the farmer, loading a cart. As he made his request, Mr. Jackson looked at him with great attention. He was a short man with a very full face, but his expression was kindly, and he consented at once to harness up.

"'T ain't a very fine animal I shall give you," he said, leaving his pitchfork standing in the pile, "but she 's uncommonly safe."

"You have a fine animal here," said Willcox, looking admiringly at the heavy draught-horse between the shafts.

"Yes," said the farmer, much pleased. "I have a pair of them. They 're not a bad weight, I can tell you. I have a couple of colts, too, that I 've just bought. Why, nobody knows; for they 're fancy horses, and I have n't time to drive after them myself. Perhaps you 'd like to see them?"

"Very much."

Mr. Jackson, again delighted, and with increasing confidence in the stranger, led out his colts and tied them in the yard.

"This one is six and that five and a half," he said, patting the haunches of each.

Willcox expressed his admiration, while a brilliant idea began to dawn on him.

"It 's a shame you have n't time to drive them."

"So it is," said Mr. Jackson.

"Supposing I exercise them for you?"

The farmer started at this audacious proposal and looked hard at Willcox's unconcerned countenance.

"Well," he said doubtfully, but with a smile, — "for how much of a pull?"

"Say about fifteen miles in all, with a rest of a few hours in somewhere."

"You know a deal about driving, I suppose?"

"I have n't driven for twelve years, but my father was a country doctor."

"I guess you may have them," said Mr. Jackson with a lenient smile. "I 'll hitch up the top buggy directly."

"I shall remain your everlasting debtor," said Willcox with a sigh of joy.

"I hope to goodness not," chuckled the farmer, as he untied the colts. "However, I ain't much afeard on that score."

Willcox was now so wild with delight that he could hardly wait for the "hitching-up." He happened to know that Miss Folsom was devotedly fond of horses and driving. The fates were certainly with him to-day. He tossed away his violets and climbed into the buggy.

"Hold on a moment," said Mr. Jackson at last, handing him the reins; "the oats and blankets must go in behind. Now, I 'm trusting them to you, and you must be tender of them, for they 're almost too willing."

Thus admonished, Willcox drove carefully out of the yard, much to the astonishment of Mrs. Jackson, who knew the value her husband set on the colts.

"Where 's he from?" she called out, after he had disappeared.

"I declare, I forgot to ask him," returned the farmer. "But he 's got a good face; he can't have come from fur away."

In about half an hour Willcox was approaching Juniper Hall on foot. He had left his horses well-blanketed in the shed of another Mr. Jackson, Miss Granger's next neighbor and landlord. This man was a cousin of the first Jackson, and almost equaled him in his regard for the colts. He directed Willcox up a narrow lane, saying he would see the cottage on a ridge at the left.

The cottage had not yet appeared when a well-known, musical laugh sounded from the other side of a stone wall. Willcox peered over a bush and saw Miss Folsom, clad in brown woollen, sitting on a low settee, with her knees crossed to support a sketch-book. An ugly brown dog was at her feet, and they were both enjoying the increasing warmth of the sunlight. But at whom was she laughing?

Willcox leaned up on tiptoe against the bush, and then dropped back and thrust his hands into his pockets. A youth and a Newfoundland dog were sprawling on a large horse-blanket, and Miss Folsom was evidently sketching them. A feeling of dismay swept over Willcox. He began to think that he had better omit this part of his day's programme. So much afraid was he that this would

prove to be the only rational course, that he seized his stick in the middle and strode rapidly forward, in order to make such a misfortune forever impossible.

Before he reached the gate, the dogs were making a terrific noise. The latch stuck a little. Impatiently he laid a hand on the gate-post and vaulted over the stone wall. In this defiant manner, and with the dogs leaping ferociously around him, he invaded the peaceful encampment.

Bessie Folsom was not alarmed. She had recognized him on the fly, so to speak, and came forward to shake hands in great glee at his prowess. Then she led the way back. "You must excuse Mr. Welsh from rising," she said, "for he is recovering from a sprained ankle. This is Mr. Willcox, Harry. Let me also present Carlo and Jim. Now can you sit in that hammock?"

As it was a very low one, Willcox found that he could, with no sacrifice of dignity, and all, including the dogs, settled down quietly again.

"This, Harry, is the Mr. Willcox to whom my brother owes so much."

"Yes, I supposed so," said the curly-headed Mr. Welsh.

Poor Willcox, in spite of his reception, could not feel easy till he had accounted for himself. He stammered, —

"I came off for a day in the country, and I thought you would like to hear from your brother."

Both Mr. Welsh and Miss Folsom assured him that he had taken the only safe way of informing

them of Tom's health and usefulness. Much relieved, he answered composedly Miss Folsom's inquiries after Mrs. Miller and other friends, and then he said, —

"You must go on with your sketch."

"*I* can't sketch," said Bessie.

"I don't like to think you untruthful."

"Come and see; seeing is believing."

Willcox went to her side. Truly, the incipient sketch was not a hopeful one, with its unaccountable outlying limbs of man and dog.

"I do it for fun," she said simply, "and to provoke Miss Granger."

Bessie wore a soft white mull handkerchief closely pinned over her brown dress, and her eyes were shaded with a light straw hat. Her cuffs were as ever of the whitest description. "How can she always keep them so?" thought Willcox with his old awe. He found it easy to look at her, for she was contentedly occupied in ruining Miss Granger's sketch-book, and Harry Welsh was rolling his Newfoundland dog over and over on the blanket.

"Don't you catch cold out here?" he said by way of sentiment.

"No, not for a short time."

Willcox could have stood there forever and a day. He felt so strong and tall, and she was sitting before him like a little pussy-cat, with all her neat perfections of toilet and figure. His only disadvantage was that he could not see her eyes. Mr. Welsh's position was much more favorable for that, and he occasionally availed himself, too, of his privileges,

though he never by any chance looked higher. The white clouds were sailing far up over the bare apple-trees; the noon air was quiet. It was all worth coming any distance for, and it was pleasant to think that no one could have the least suspicion of how happy he was.

At last the sound of a bell was heard from the piazza of the cottage above. Mr. Welsh slowly rolled himself over in search of his crutches, and said with equal deliberation, —

"I am going to back out of my engagement for to-day, Miss Bessie, and come instead to-morrow."

"Indeed you must not, Harry; there is plenty of everything, and the more people, the jollier it will be."

"Well, then," said Harry, with ready resignation, "I must limp down to my quarters for half a minute. Don't delay dinner a moment."

He went off nimbly on his crutches, and then Willcox, grasping the situation, began to explain that he could n't possibly dine with them. "Oh, you," said Bessie, turning haughtily on this new rebel, — "you, at least, shall do as you are told."

It is hardly necessary to say that Willcox followed submissively after this. The bit of imperiousness was, indeed, well acted for one of Miss Folsom's slight experience; but the ensuing silence, and the queer sensation of being trotted after by such an humble yet long-legged individual, forced her to leave him in the sitting-room and to seek a moment's relief upstairs. There she found Miss Granger, who had already heard of the new arrival.

"I hope Maggie has some cold meat in the house," she said, with a really kind-hearted interest in the welfare of her guests.

"I sent for some steak this morning," said Bessie. "You know I expected Mr. Welsh."

"That was fortunate," said Miss Granger, setting back her easel and painting. "Do you know, Bessie," she added, her thoughts recurring to some news brought to her with the letters from Mr. Jackson's, "the poor fellow is going to ask you to drive with him."

"He can't have any such idea," said Miss Folsom indignantly. "Of course, he would come in a buggy."

Miss Granger shook her head. "It is a very nice one."

"I could n't go," said Bessie decidedly. "Could I?"

"You know best, dear."

"No, but you must advise me, Hattie."

"Well, dear, I don't know that I ever heard of a parallel case before, but I suppose it would please him very much," —

"So it would," said Bessie relentingly.

"And so you should n't do it unless you care to please him."

Miss Folsom turned away with some vexation at this conclusion.

"I can't go, and I don't believe he means to ask me."

"Well, get ready for dinner, dear. I see Mr. Welsh coming."

Pity for Willcox's coming disappointment made Bessie as attentive to him as possible during the dinner-hour. The dignity of the meal was somewhat threatened by the behavior of Maggie, the daughter of one of their poorer neighbors, who was supposed to facilitate matters in the dining-room as well as in the kitchen, but who was so shy of thus becoming the centre of admiration that she handed dishes to Miss Granger from behind the kitchen door, to the artist's great inconvenience. Even thus she could not escape attention, and was obliged to smile bashfully as she caught the eye of one or another of the guests.

"A little fool!" commented Bessie during one of the girl's absences.

"A person of rare sensibility!" put in Harry Welsh.

Miss Granger, being thus made aware of her attendant's idiosyncrasies, drew her roughly from her retirement by the extraordinary command that she should pass the vegetables. Her behavior at this trying crisis won increased admiration from Mr. Welsh.

"What airiness of gesture!" he exclaimed later. "The thoughtful, gracefully-abstracted manner with which she re-touches the dishes she has set down; the faint blush which rises to her cheek when one invades her reveries by asking for gravy, — it is all delicious."

"I must say I think the natives of this region unusually uninteresting," said Miss Folsom. "One sometimes finds such nice people in a place like this."

"Oh, there are a few," said Mr. Welsh. "The Randolphs at East Walpole, for instance."

"I know only the son, the clergyman," rejoined Miss Folsom with a look of mild distaste, so evident that even Miss Granger smiled.

"Are there any clergymen you do like?" asked Willcox gravely.

Bessie was annoyed that her feeling should be thus attributed to general principles.

"I don't think of any," she said hesitatingly. "That is accidental, however. The few I have known have been excessively inclined towards matrimony. That lessens one's respect, I think, for the profession."

Willcox was too busily engaged in listening and pondering to laugh at this, but Harry Welsh was evidently much amused.

"Your view is a disinterested one, certainly," he said.

Towards the latter part of dinner, Willcox began to meditate just how he should give his invitation for the drive. He at last rejected all projects of luring Miss Folsom away in order to invite her privately, even the rather subtle plan of taking her to see the horses and then asking her to try them. Just before they all rose from table, he turned to her with really a great deal of dignity.

"Miss Folsom, I have Mr. Jackson's colts at a stable near by, and I have hoped that you will drive out with me a little way to try them."

Bessie turned red without answering. He had asked in such an innocent way that it seemed foolish

in her to raise objections. Then she suddenly took in the full meaning of his words.

"Mr. Jackson's colts! not Daniel Jackson's new colts?"

"Yes," returned Willcox, with deep pleasure at his heart.

"Oh, I must see them. How did you get them? Can you really manage them?"

She looked at Mr. Welsh appealingly.

"It would be wicked to miss such a chance, would n't it?"

"It really would," said Harry. "If I had n't been such a cripple, *I* would have given you the invitation before now."

At this Bessie straightened herself with resolution.

"Fifteen years ago I would n't have thought of it," she said; "but at my age it would be ridiculous to lose such a treat for any silly notions. I will go with pleasure."

If Willcox had been familiar with French literature and blind to his own interests, — both most unlikely suppositions, — he might have quoted authoritative passages to show that at the age of thirty and for some years later a woman is at the zenith of her power and beauty; while many English writers might have been cited to prove the increased likelihood of her abusing her sovereignty. As it was, he simply looked at her in devout gratitude.

One good thing about Hattie Granger was that she never found fault with Bessie for changing her mind. After their guests had gone out, she helped

her pin her veil, refraining from any allusion to her changeableness.

"He is better looking than I remembered him," she said. "His face is stronger."

"Yes, he is really Olympian to-day by the side of poor Harry. But what a horrid blue necktie!"

"I don't know," said Miss Granger. "I should like to paint him just as he is."

It was characteristic of Bessie that a remark from her friend on such topics would immediately change her own opinion. She was very observant of style in masculine apparel, in spite of the severity of her own dress; but she recognized that there might be also an artistic standard in the matter, — at least in the country.

When, therefore, she climbed from the lane into the buggy with Willcox's help, for Harry was standing at the horses' heads, she took unalloyed pleasure in his unpretentious dress as well as his stately physique. With a sense of heaven-daring impiety, the momentary hero climbed to his Thais's side, not bold enough to examine what fascinating thing it was she had over her face; Harry let go of the horses' heads, raising his hat as he stood back on his crutches; the colts began their haughty progress down the lane, and in a few moments the light equipage was flying along the road.

It was pure ecstasy at first. Both were without words to express their delight. Notwithstanding the honor done him so far, Willcox was startled when his companion first broke the silence by using his Christian name.

"Jim," she said earnestly, "you're a good old fellow."

To this doubtful compliment Willcox was about to murmur a doubtful reply when he was greatly relieved to find that the ugly brown dog was the Jim addressed. This faithful follower of Miss Folsom had determined to accompany her on this strange adventure also, and was very nimbly doing so on the top of a stone wall, both shaky and briar-beset. And he followed well during the whole of the drive, though put to unusual speed.

"You have two devout admirers of the same name, I see," said Willcox, after he had recovered his self-possession.

"Oh, that is why you started so," said Bessie; then her amusement was too much for her, and she laughed long and merrily.

At last she said, "The Jim I spoke to is a very honest old dog, though not handsome."

"He resembles the other Jim, then," said Willcox to himself. It was odd. Many of the remarks he made that day proved to be inaudible. Vocalization came especially hard.

Bessie went on.

"When I see dogs which are of the purest breed and much petted, refuse to go more than a mile from home, and then find a cur like that, which nobody cares for, able to do his twenty or thirty miles a day, I think we shall discover soon that, with dogs as with men, pedigree is not everything. Jim is horribly ugly; I don't deny it; but he has real dogginess in him, — grit, devotion, and a ceaseless desire to follow somebody."

"Me too," sighed Willcox, this time with no intention of speaking aloud.

When, a good deal after, he confided to his companion the limitations to which he had pledged himself, in the use of the colts, he found she had even a greater idea of their fragility than he had himself. She devised the plan of giving them up at Daniel Jackson's, without returning the three miles to Juniper Hall.

"If you don't mind," she said, "a walk of three miles home, and then two miles additional to East Walpole. You might return to North Walpole, but there are fewer trains from there."

As she seemed to value the added distance they could thus drive into the woods, Willcox readily assented.

He could not have asked her to be happier than she was. They did not talk much, except in the ejaculatory way natural with so much around them to claim attention. Bessie watched every revolution of the wheel, and made many wise remarks on horses.

"I shall be spoilt for my stupid Peggoty," she sighed. "It must be very hard to drive these horses."

For all answer, Willcox offered her the reins. She took them with inexpressible awe; and thenceforth, though all prospect of conversation was at an end, he knew that he was improving the occasion to the utmost possible extent.

Half an hour later the colts, untouched by fatigue, and they themselves still in love with the swift rolling of their wheels on the narrow and well-shaded

roads, drew near to Daniel Jackson's. Bessie gravely drew up the horses.

"I will get out now and walk along the road towards home, and you can return the colts. They are not a bit tired, are they?"

"If you like," said Willcox doubtfully, after he had already sprung out to help her down, "I can tell Mr. Jackson that I want them longer, and then I can take you home."

"Yes, so you can," said Miss Folsom.

"But I don't want to," said the poor fellow within himself. "It would be so soon over." He stood silently looking up at her, with his arm on the upper step of the carriage.

"I don't know," said Bessie; "it would be six miles for the horses, and only three for us."

"Ah yes, come down," said Willcox, holding out his arms; "unless — unless you had rather drive. The colts are all right."

"No, I would rather walk," said Bessie, amending his phrase, with but the slightest emphasis; and, putting her hand in his, she leaped lightly down and set off along the road.

She was picking ferns when Willcox at last joined her. A steep and grassy lane ran off just beyond her.

"If you had more time," she said, rising to walk on, "I would show you the view from the top of this lane."

"I have as much time as you will give me."

"I have all day, of course; but do you know about your trains?"

"I don't care a wag of Jim's tail about my trains. I will walk till starlight, sleep in the waiting-room, and take the morning train down;" and Willcox started up the lane, whistling to Jim, and hallooing in pure ecstasy. He had felt on his honor, somehow, in the buggy, and besides, the colts and the other Jim had had all the attention.

"Miss Folsom," he suddenly said, dropping back to her side, "do you know how strange this is to me, being out-of-doors all day, free to wander around and be happy?"

"It must be pleasant," said Bessie sympathetically.

"Will you do one little thing for me, so as to make me think that the universe is altogether perfect?"

"Yes, I will," said Bessie frankly.

Willcox stopped, dumfounded at this unconditional promise.

"Oh, I shall make a larger request now."

"No," said Bessie stoutly. "I promised what you were then thinking of. Now you must be honest about it."

"But it was a very small thing."

"Well, out with it!"

"I wanted to have your shawl to carry."

"If you call that a small favor, you sha'n't have it."

"Ah, but you promised."

Miss Folsom had to yield the point and hand over her shawl. He was certainly a curious man. She had just made up her mind that he was not a gentle-

man, because he had not at once relieved her of her shawl; and now he pleaded for that office as the one thing needed to make the universe perfect to him. It is possible, however, that as an act of courtesy, merely, it would have had more weight with her; for what is done from courtesy one may expect at all times and to all people.

He was irresistible just now, however, in his boyish pleasure: he was literally dancing up the lane, and now he had hung her shawl on a branch and was climbing the tree. Bessie walked swiftly forward to capture it, but he saw her just in time, and came sliding down, regardless of clothes, to make off with it. Then he determined to make the dog wear it, which led to his chasing him over the wall and into the brushwood. Miss Folsom laughed without intermission, and Willcox became more and more determined to succeed. At length Jim turned on him with a growl, but found himself picked up bodily and carried off. Willcox came over the wall with him triumphantly, as Miss Folsom, tired with laughing, and having also reached the desired spot, sat down upon an oak-root at the top of the hill.

"Which Jim are you proud of now, Miss Folsom, and what shall be done with the vanquished?"

"I think you may put him down and go for my shawl."

Willcox looked around, whistled, and disappeared over the wall again for the wrap which he had dropped.

It was a few minutes before he came back with it. Bessie had become quiet, gazing at the view be-

low them. She rose and spread the shawl over the oak-root, then looked off again at the wild, cloud-shadowed valley below, leading away from them at a slight angle. The hills beyond were bluish, for a light haze had settled over the country. The sun was still high, though the western clouds in lofty strata seemed in their more tender light to anticipate sunset. The ground-hemlock, or juniper, and the shaggy pitch-pines and more slender larches made a little covert around them; while the great bare branches of the oak above, running out to the right, measured with their few feet of length the whole sweep of the distant prospect to the highest and bluest of the hills. On the nearer hills at the left, a few cows were feeding over an apparently fenceless waste, and from the bushes in the hollow a partridge arose heavily, on his own business merely.

Miss Folsom was very curious to see the effect of this sudden outlook on her merry companion, and was prepared remorselessly to condemn the probable conventional praise. But men have times of great wisdom. Willcox caught in a second the change of mood. (Would that such quickness of perception outlasted a lover's need of it!) For a few moments he looked out over the valley without a word; then, stretching himself on the moss before her, he plucked the grass idly and allowed the silence to become more and more audible.

Miss Folsom sat back against a tree, marveling that he had done so well; for she could scarcely blame him for choosing a position which, in her favor, somewhat ignored the view: and, besides, one

of her tenets was the necessity of slightly contemning Nature in order to enjoy her.

But his silence meant none of these things. It was instinct in him. Such a man could never be counted on for any true appreciation of things æsthetic.

Meanwhile, Bessie herself was not so overwhelmingly lost in the beauty before her as to be heedless of the lengthening silence. Her prostrate companion was overestimating the time she needed for poetic abstraction. He could never have felt such things himself if he did not know that such visitations of ecstasy are short, and, in non-artificial minds, easily broken in on by mirth and common human feelings. Miss Folsom was becoming quite tangled up in her theories, and had half a mind to hurl an acorn at his uncovered yellow head, when the unconscious dog, true child of Nature after all, came rambling unconcernedly from a neighboring thicket and trampled them both into active resistance.

Willcox sat up, with his cheeks slightly flushed. He had evidently been genuinely absorbed in something. He rolled the dog out of the way over his knee, and dusted the edge of Miss Folsom's dress with his handkerchief.

"It is a lovely view, is n't it?" said Bessie. (Alas, that it should have been she, after all, who sank to conventional terms!)

Willcox turned, somewhat astonished, and looked at it.

"Yes, it is," he said, "very pretty."

"Do you mean to say you have not seen it till now?"

"I had n't looked at it," he replied penitently.

After that, he gazed at it steadily for a minute or so, then turned on her with a laugh in his eye.

"Is n't it fun?" he said, — "the whole day, the drive and walk and everything. I can't believe it, and I 'm not going to try. I don't believe it 's ever going to end either. It 's mine always, — the lovely daylight, the great sky up there, and you, and everything. It 's strange how a man grows to deserve all the good he has. I 'm not afraid any more. I 'm just altogether happy for once in my life."

Bessie scarcely knew what to say to this, and after a few moments of silence he went on, still gazing at her contentedly.

"You think, probably, that it is strange that you can do nothing to prevent it; but you can't, and you know you can't. You can't make yourself different from what you are, and that is all I care about just now. I have no interest in this old sinner;" and he brought his fist down smartly on himself.

"I should be ever so sorry to have you any less happy," said Miss Folsom softly.

"You see!" said Willcox in triumph. "There are times when everybody must treat a man gently. I knew you could n't hurt me just now."

He pulled his hat a little over his eyes and whistled softly to himself, as he looked down the valley.

"Think of the poor people in New York," he went on at last, — "Peters at our office and the rest of them. How few people know anything about what

it is to be happy, — how simple it is! I have n't always known. I could n't tell them now, except that it 's to feel perfect. I think on the whole it 's feeling sure that you will refuse me nothing, even though I must be careful to ask very little. You never meant, did you, to give me everything I wanted; and yet you are doing just that thing now. Hear the bird calling from the bushes down there. I never heard anything so beautiful before."

After another silence Bessie began to speak, finding that she had to clear her voice a little in order to do so.

"Is it wild like this around your home in New Hampshire?"

"Yes, it 's wild when you get away on the hills. The town lies along the Connecticut on a hill-slope, and we have a good many trees. The houses are set way back from the road. Each of them seems a little settlement by itself, with its comfortable sheds and gardens and water-troughs. Mother is almost always in the kitchen or back sitting-room, or standing in the doorway looking up at the grapevines that roof the yard. Dear mother! I wish you knew her. I think your mother is not living," he added, with a glance of sympathy at Bessie.

"No, I have lost both father and mother. My home was very different from yours," she went on with some difficulty. "We lived in more of a town, and I guess were rather poorer than your family. We lived right on the main street, in a not very pretty house. My father had been at the head of the grammar-school; but when I remember him, he

was librarian of the town library, and clerk of the town, too, I think, and perhaps a few other things. I have always been intensely proud of both him and my mother. They were nicer than anybody else in the town, nicer than Tom and I by a good deal; we have had a rougher life of it. My mother was in every way a thorough lady."

Willcox felt sure that she must have been, but he made no answer.

Miss Folsom then told him about her maternal uncle, Mr. Fuller, and his home on the Sound, which had been her only place of refuge since her parents' death, till Miss Granger and she had set up their little home together.

It seemed but half an hour later, and indeed was far from sunset-time, when Bessie rose and said they must certainly walk on home. She handed him the shawl now, without waiting to have him ask for it: he ought to be trained to that bit of etiquette.

Willcox lingered regretfully behind her, with his arm around a tree. Then he said, as he followed down, —

"I shall name these hills the Delectable Mountains. I may never be so thoroughly happy again."

There was but one thing more which Willcox remembered especially about the day, though the walk home was most pleasant. Miss Folsom, having found his train for him on her time-table, made her neighbor, Mr. Jackson, put a horse to his wagon to take him to the East Walpole station. Then both she and Miss Granger walked down the lane to see him off.

"How soon do you go to your uncle's?" asked Willcox.

"Oh, I don't go to Southfields for several months," said Bessie. "Miss Granger and I are both to be in New York for the latter part of May; then she returns here, and I go to Mrs. Meredith's in Newport. I am to have charge of her children during the month of June."

At Mr. Jackson's, as Miss Granger was exchanging a few words with her landlord, Bessie looked at him with a bright smile, and said, bringing her hand slowly around from behind her, "it would be a shame to have you come home from the country without a flower in your buttonhole. This is from our conservatory;" and with dexterous swiftness, she pulled a little nosegay of pinks through his buttonhole.

To her amazement, the tears sprang to his eyes with equal promptness.

"Miss Folsom," he said, "you can never be sorry for having been so wonderfully good to me to-day. I am not the man to be blind to the difference between us. How I ever dared to come up here, I don't know. But you have been willing to make yourself perfect to me, because you knew I asked only for a little."

It was all he could manage to say; and afterwards, — on the road, in the train, and at home, — he wondered if he had made her understand that this day was to him a portion of Paradise, allowed him by her exquisite goodness; and that he was not such a fool as to misunderstand her because of her generosity.

CHAPTER X.

ELSA was standing one afternoon at the door of Miss Wilton's apartment, looking in a perplexed and displeased way at some one who wished to see her mistress. She could not recall his name, yet she knew she distrusted him. The young fellow stood hat in hand, with an air of engaging politeness. His standing collar was high and rigid, and his head emerged from it in a way to remind one of steel engravings of benevolent gentlemen at the beginning of the century. His eyebrows were strongly marked and curved downwards; his eyes were dark and merry; his hair was brushed forward on his forehead. His mouth, however, was not clean-shaven as old fashions would have required. He wore a short, crisp mustache, with a suggestion of wax at the ends, and his mouth was drawn down in the middle with a peculiar and vigorous curve.

"Say, please, it is Mr. Raynor, Howard Raynor, who had the honor of returning a five dollar bill to her a short time ago."

Elsa gave way and let him in. She was unlike herself; her eyes were heavy and her movements slow. Even Raynor noticed her appearance, and gave a low whistle as she went off. Presently she returned and ushered him into the sitting-room where Miss Wilton was sitting by her writing-table. The latter

turned her head and greeted him pleasantly enough, then looking again at a letter she held she said indifferently, —

"You have some business with me?"

Raynor bowed politely to vacancy, and replied, with no circumlocution, —

"I wished to say that last night I was grieved to hear a man named Schreitenberger speak of you and of your indebtedness to him. Now I may have abused Mr. Davids to you the other day, but I really have an attachment for him as well as he for me and mine. I have n't the same feeling of devotion and respect for Schreitenberger. My knowledge of him, indeed, warrants me in this view. I thought I would like to put my experience at your service."

"Thank you," said Miss Wilton dryly. "I am ready to hear what you know of him."

Her visitor looked disappointed at this uncommunicative answer.

"Well," he continued a little vaguely, "I understand to begin with that this fellow is a foreigner, and has been here but a very short time."

He looked questioningly at Miss Wilton, but she gave him no assistance.

"I don't pretend myself to be any too good. You know something of me already, and the fact is that I sometimes try to straighten out my villainous luck in every-day life by one which has always been more favorable to me, — I mean the luck of the gaming-table."

Miss Wilton nodded with a look of amusement.

"Ah, you know that?" said Raynor delightedly.

"You have been making inquiries about me? You are a trifle knowing after all. Well, I 'm glad of it. It 's hardly a favorable way to introduce one's self, but you know it, and I need n't try to sail under false colors. Very well; I met Schreitenberger a week ago or more. I was taking a hand at poker, and he was looking on. He does n't know the game. I saw him again Wednesday, and treated him a little, and when he was feeling a little high he let slip your name. Of course I wanted to knock him down for uttering it in such a place, but I said nothing whatever. He forgot afterwards that he had mentioned names at all, and began telling me about his affairs with you, without giving names. Of course I put two and two together, and against my will came into possession of certain facts" —

"Such as" — said Lilla very coolly.

"Well, his holding your note of hand," said Raynor tentatively; then, seeing her smile, "By hocus, have n't I got it right? The man was so tipsy" —

Miss Wilton laughed outright, and Raynor rubbed his face sheepishly.

"You are determined to fight your own battles, I see," he said. "Well, I know something anyhow. If it is n't he, it 's his friends in Germany who hold the note. No, that can't be, because last night — See here," continued Raynor, turning defiantly on her, "you are not dealing honestly by me; because last night he did have some sort of a paper. Now I 'll swear to that."

Miss Wilton became serious at once.

"Did he have a paper?" she asked. "Are you sure?"

"Absolutely. In your own handwriting, too."

"How do you know my writing?"

"Mr. Davids has some of your autographs," returned Raynor with a malicious glance. "Now you need not suppose I lie incessantly. That 's a little too bad."

Miss Wilton drew herself up, startled at his tone of familiarity. To Raynor their interview seemed a game, and a merry one; and oddly enough she found it impossible to suspect him of any treacherous motives. She threw more coldness into her voice, however, as she asked, —

"Then Schreitenberger, if that 's what you call him, showed you this paper, did he?"

"Not at all. I wish he had. He held it, and I saw only enough of it to be sure of the writing. Then he pocketed it and drank some more, and then he took it out and read it again. At last, he drank so much, for he was uncommonly flush of money last night, that he let it drop, and took a nap. Then was my chance to read it, had I been the sort of man you imagine. Instead, I borrowed it for a day to show to you;" and Raynor put his hand inside his coat.

"You have it," cried Lilla joyfully. "Let me see it."

"Why, no," said Raynor calmly. "You say he holds no note of yours. I have simply made a mistake. I have n't looked at it, I assure you."

"It 's not a note," said Miss Wilton eagerly; "it 's a receipt which he stole. It belongs to me; on my word it does. Look at it and assure yourself. If you really care to do me a favor, just read it."

"Ah, so I thought," said Raynor, withdrawing his hand from his pocket; "and it 's a deuced pity he was not such a fool as to get drunk and drop it. I should like nothing better than to have it and to surrender it at your mere command."

There was a dead silence after this. Miss Wilton sat looking away from him, and Raynor gazed, first at her, then about the room, till he at last drew up a chair and sat down.

"I am a cursed impertinent rascal, of course," he said, "to worm this out of you; but perhaps because I 'm not over-good I may be of more use to you than some others. I 'd like to; by Jove, I should. I never hurt a woman in my life, except the woman I loved, and that was by letting her marry a good-for-nothing."

"Why did you do that?"

"I did n't know I should turn out that way."

"Oh, you married her yourself."

"I did."

"And now are breaking her heart by your gambling."

"She does n't know it. We are not living together at present."

Miss Wilton looked at him curiously. He certainly did not give himself a good character. She had every reason to distrust him. And yet she did not distrust him, but was filled with a desire to tell him of Schreitenberger's claims and persecution, and ask his help. She must then, of course, tell of her dishonorable act at Vienna, but he would only laugh at that. Her verbal confession would give him no

handle against her; besides, the whole business was blackmail, punishable in the courts.

"Do you know any of my friends?" she asked, with the sense that she was weakening fast in her resolution to avoid such a confidant.

"For pity's sake, Miss Wilton, don't look up my references. They would be death to me. I have told you myself that I am a gambler and that I have deserted my wife. You can add to that anything you choose in the way of minor misdemeanors. If I am a trifle better than the result you reach, it 's too little to quarrel over. The question is whether I could be of use to *you*, and whether I should play you fairly or falsely. You 're safer to hit it right yourself than with the advice of those who know me best. If you refuse to believe in me, I won't deny that I shall try to get the facts out of Schreitenberger, and in any case I should take sides with a lady as against a scoundrel."

"You give yourself a bad character," said Miss Wilton gravely. "It would be a better sign, perhaps, if you had some illusions concerning yourself."

Raynor's face fell, as if this were a requirement he had not anticipated.

"I think, however, that you would like to be of service to me."

Raynor's eyes did not falter under her steady gaze, but on the contrary a look of pleasure leaped into them; and Miss Wilton, right or wrong, was satisfied.

Briefly, and with a sense of unhoped-for relief,

she told of her unpaid debt in Vienna and of Schreitenberger's persecutions.

"He will not have a cent more of my money," she said at last, "but I should like to hold that receipt. Could n't you get it in some way?"

"I don't see how, except by paying for it. But it 's worth nothing. His claim is worth nothing."

"He could make it disagreeable for me."

"Get your maid to contradict him at every point."

Miss Wilton rose impatiently, as if this advice suggested disagreeable associations.

"Would nothing induce her?"

"No."

"By gosh, I should n't pay *her* wages much longer."

He sat for some moments in deep reflection.

"I shall have to think this over," he said at last. "I think Schreitenberger let you off cheap, though I ought n't to say so, being retained on the other side. You can trust me, Miss Wilton. It may not always seem so, but you have n't made a mistake this time."

He came nearer, and, before she had guessed his intentions, he had raised her hand to his lips.

"My retaining fee," he said, affecting not to notice its sharp withdrawal. "My honor is now pledged."

The summer was approaching. Miss Wilton had promised to visit the Merediths in Newport early in June, but for the succeeding months she had no invitations, and she felt too straitened in income to undertake any independent summer journeys. She

had been forced to underlet her apartment, and though this would not take effect till autumn, she decided to close it entirely before going to Newport, transferring her possessions to Mrs. Miller's, to which place she meant to return after her Newport visit, if she saw no other opening.

Mrs. Miller, though not over well pleased, had consented to this arrangement.

"I suppose," she said to herself, "if Miss Wilton knew we were at all related, nothing would induce her to come to me; — unless she were short of money," she added after a pause. "I believe she is a little troubled now on money matters. She was most wonderfully quiet and subdued when she came here. My husband told me to keep clear of the Wiltons, and this is how I do it."

Willcox, since his day at Walpole, had led a dull life. First, he had longed for the middle of May to come. That had now come, Miss Folsom was in town again, and still he was not happy. It was, perhaps, his own fault that neither of the two interviews he had had with her had been free from painful incidents. That day in the country had been a wonder never to be repeated. Well, for one thing, he had been in a happy mood that day; the world had had to smile back again. Now he was not happy, and nothing could make him so. Miss Folsom had done her best for him, but he had somehow slipped back into being an awkward, underbred, unamiable, ungainly wretch; with all her care and kindliness, she could not make their times of meeting pleasant to either of them. Once, even, she had shown dis-

pleasure in a way which the least sensitive man must have felt. She could be fearfully cutting. When Willcox, fresh from this revelation of her capabilities, had looked back to reconcile it with the happiness of that April day, he recognized that, as a matter of fact, he had been very wary, even though ignorant of the condign punishment which would have followed any misdeed. What an innocent fellow he had been in those times! Yet it had proved a prevailing innocence.

It was a rainy afternoon; but as Willcox reached home at five o'clock the sky had grown lighter. He hung up his coat and hat and went upstairs to the sitting-room, where he took a seat by the fire. He did not notice that some one was sitting in the window. Presently, however, as he was trying to sneeze, he heard a clear child's voice say, —

"Can't you perfect that sneeze, Mr. Willcox?"

He turned and laughed.

"I consider it perfection already, Maggie. Come here and see me."

The girl came to him willingly. She was about nine years old, but had left her childish prettiness behind her, and was a shy, solemn-eyed little maiden, with very straight hair. She would no longer obey such summons except with personal friends.

"Was n't that a perfect sneeze, Maggie?" continued Willcox, drawing her down on his knee.

Maggie deigned no answer to this, but clasped her hands together and remarked, —

"I can't learn my geography till mamma comes

out. I don't know whether we have the Southern States next, or a review."

"Is your mamma very busy?"

"Yes; Miss Folsom is in the office."

"Are you sure?" asked Willcox, surprised. He put her down, opened the door into the hall, and listened.

"You are right, Maggie," he said, coming back to the fire. "She is there. I did n't know it."

"Oh, I saw her long ago," returned Maggie scornfully. "I opened the front door for her, and I told her it was your birthday."

"And what did she say to that?"

"She said, 'Give him my congratulations upon this suspicious day.'"

"Was that complimentary, do you think, Maggie, to call it a 'suspicious' day?"

"I don't know," said the girl doubtfully. "It 's in my spelling-book, but I have n't got as far as that yet. There, she 's coming out. Now I can see mamma."

"Ah, stay here, please, Maggie. Don't leave me all alone. She 's coming in here."

"No, she is n't," replied Maggie, standing by him nevertheless. "She 's going downstairs."

They listened for a moment, and heard Mrs. Miller say, —

"It 's raining, Miss Folsom. Won't you wait a little?"

"No," was the reply in Bessie's sweet little voice. "It 's getting too dark."

"Then let me get you my umbrella."

Upon this the dreaded invasion took place, Miss Folsom following in Mrs. Miller's footsteps.

Mrs. Miller sent Maggie upstairs for an umbrella, and then addressed Willcox.

"We are to lose Miss Folsom. She is to make a visit in Newport."

"So I understand," said Willcox, grasping the back of a chair now that Maggie had deserted him. She seemed quite ready for Newport in her irreproachable spring toilet.

"Not exactly a visit," remarked Miss Folsom conscientiously. "I have promised to take charge of Mrs. Meredith's children for the month of June while Miss Granger is having a cousin to visit her. Still, it cannot be otherwise than pleasant with such pleasant surroundings."

"It 's amusing, too, to see the people," added Mrs. Miller.

"Yes. Mr. Stanton is to be there, the one who has been acting so well."

"Mrs. Meredith has been giving some private theatricals," explained Mrs. Miller to Willcox.

"Perhaps they will repeat that, as Miss Wilton will be on hand too."

"I think they are to have something new. The carriage-house is to be fitted up as a stage, and Mr. Hugh Kneller, the professional actor, is invited down. You have heard of him?"

"I think not," said Willcox.

"Then you mentioned an Englishman," put in Mrs. Miller.

"Yes, I don't remember his name. I am told he is a very handsome man."

Miss Folsom now gave her attention to some drawings which Mrs. Miller presented as the work of her nieces, so that Mr. Willcox remained in silent reverie until Maggie came down with the umbrella. Then he made a courageous resolve.

"Are you going directly home, Miss Folsom?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps you will let me have the walk with you?"

"I am afraid it is raining, Mr. Willcox."

"I think not much; and, at any rate, the weather alone will not be too severe for me."

Bessie smiled acquiescingly and passed out of the room.

Willcox was right; it did not rain much: but he held the umbrella carefully over her.

"You will find it easier to take my arm," he said.

"Thanks; I find it very easy as it is."

This was not a favorable start to the conversation, and nothing further was said till Bessie asked with an air of philanthropic interest, —

"How is the iron business prospering?"

"Oh, very fairly, thank you."

Willcox wished much he could tell her in detail of his own brightening prospects; — for how was she to know except through him? — but he did not dare to do so. A little later, however, when she was speaking of some good sales Miss Granger had made from her summer's work, he took courage and brought out a few sentences about his own success. This was his first year as a partner, and his receipts

would probably be much in advance of his former salary. He even mentioned that that had been two thousand.

Miss Folsom listened gravely, making unavoidable comparisons between the opportunities open to a man and her own slender resources.

"What can you do with so much money?" she asked.

"I am accumulating a little capital. I put it in the business year by year."

"Oh, yes. But you do other things with it, too, I know."

"What?" asked Willcox, fearing some allusion to the new clothes he was wearing.

"You give to foreign missions. You really believe in them, I suppose." The last sentence was added meditatively, as if to herself.

"Almost everybody gives to them. But how did you know that I do?"

"Mrs. Miller said so."

They were by this time approaching a populous cross-street. Miss Folsom was about to plunge into the crowd, when Willcox laid his hand on her shoulder and drew her back.

"What is it?" she asked, withdrawing from his touch with some displeasure.

"Nothing; excuse me," said he nervously, looking after a man who had passed just before them. "He is gone now; — only Peters from our office; — I didn't want him to see us. That was n't right of me, was it?" added Willcox piteously, as he caught a glimpse of her face. "But he is n't the sort of

man to know you by sight. He would put two and two together."

Willcox was getting in deeper and deeper, and wisely stopped. Miss Folsom assumed an intense haughtiness.

"Then it is hardly best, perhaps, for me to know his friends. I am not accustomed to hide myself."

"You are right." Willcox could add no more, for she was going ahead across the crowded street. He followed her with a woeful sinking at the heart, but managed to say, as he came up with her, —

"Don't imagine that Peters knows anything of you from me. He doesn't know your name even. It is no double-dealing in me to say that he is not a friend of mine. I only thought" —

The poor fellow broke off helplessly. He was too proud to turn back under the disdain so clearly expressed in Bessie's little figure, and at last began again, his voice showing, however, how much it unnerved him.

"I am miserably wrong, of course. The right, the best feelings don't always come to me first. I heard once" — the extremity of the crisis drove Willcox on to bring out something which had been long on his mind — "that some one who knew me slightly told you in the horse-cars that I was no gentleman. I do not know what you said in return, but to have it said to you was a very sore blow to me. I prove it myself, however, every time I see you."

"In that case," returned Miss Folsom with great deliberation, "in that particular case, I should have

defended you, if your accuser had been a woman whose opinion mattered to either of us. You seemed to me a prince of the blood from the contrast."

"Was that the way you felt?" cried Willcox, trying to keep his gratitude from too open expression. "I think a word from you could make me royal. I can't imagine any higher tribunal than your natural feeling. Is it possible, do you suppose," — lowering his voice at a warning glance from Bessie, — "for a man to change in such matters?"

Miss Folsom shook her head doubtfully.

"The small things of life are not as easily managed as the large. It is, I think, the right perception of feminine sentiments that constitutes the gentleman."

Willcox paused, in genuine admiration at this ready definition. It was less discouraging, too, than those that involve too much on the part of one's ancestors.

"It *is* the little things that are stubborn, I know," he said. "But if a man has a feeling steadily night and day, it ought to have its effect on little things as well as great. Don't you think such a feeling might change a man completely?"

Bessie paused solemnly.

"Few feelings have such power as that," she said.

Willcox walked a few moments with his eyes fixed on the sidewalk; then recovered himself with a little start and restored the umbrella to its proper position over her head. He had evidently nothing more to say.

"I turn here," observed Bessie at last, as her cav-

alier was absent-mindedly walking ahead at a street-corner. "I have given you a long walk for a wet day."

"No," said Willcox.

Her voice was wonderfully musical. It seemed to Willcox that it reached his heart without the mediation of his senses. Whenever she began to talk, the first accent was a pleasure. She did begin once more as they approached Miss Granger's.

"The word 'gentleman' changes its meaning, I think, in every one's mouth. Perhaps I put too much meaning into it; but such ideals are the only possessions left to me now. It is no great hardship to me to earn my living, but I should be poor indeed if I were to make such poverty an excuse for accepting my life at a low valuation. I am to be away a month now at Newport. I am anticipating it as an entire change of thought to me, and," she added in a very significant tone, "I hope to others also."

They walked in silence to her door. Willcox's eyes first met hers as she turned on the highest door-step, having her key in her hand. She was obliged to soften somewhat in the face of his utter humility. She added gently, as she held out her hand, —

"We all have to help each other in this life, and I count on you as a friend to make it easy for me, and not — in any way to make it hard."

"I will try," said Willcox, bravely rallying himself to meet this appeal. "Perhaps I shall succeed."

CHAPTER XI.

A FORTNIGHT later Bessie had forgotten all the disagreeable sides of city life in the novel charms of Newport. The three children whom she was to teach had a pleasant sitting-room of their own, which held their piano, their school-book library, and their little work-tables, on which last were usually a goodly collection of seashore spoils. This room opened on a square, covered piazza, distinctively the children's piazza. Miss Folsom's bedroom won her heart from the first. It was small, but was furnished with great care; and from its high position commanded a wide sea-view. Best of all, the sun set only just around the corner, and the sunset-hour, with its flush of sea and sky and the cool breezes from the water, might compensate one for much noonday drudgery.

A great part of her work was new to her. She found herself glad to refresh her memory by midnight studies in complex fractions and United States history. She acquired fresh knowledge in the line of shells and butterflies, for, to the Meredith children, these were the chief products of Newport. In the afternoons she was at liberty, if she chose, to take the place of the nurse and accompany the children as they drove their little phaeton to the best butterfly pastures. This was so pleasant to her that

she spent some ingenuity in making her society equally wished for by the children. Her severest penalty for disobedience or inattention was to refuse to take their next drive with them. Considered as a punishment, this had been known to reduce all three to tears. Bessie was not devotedly fond of children, but she had much tact in managing them, and probably was better obeyed than a more tender-hearted governess would have been.

When Mrs. Meredith's guests began to arrive, Miss Folsom found herself more solitary. She less frequently followed Mrs. Meredith on decorative errands about the house. She took her meals with the children and the housekeeper, and spent her evenings over a book in the school-room, or in long meditations by her chamber-window. Mrs. Meredith would often, however, sit by with some work while the children recited their lessons, and sometimes, indeed, breakfasted with them, leaving her sister to do the honors of the house, so that Bessie was not left in complete ignorance of what was going on.

"I expect Miss Wilton to-night," was the announcement one morning. "I wonder if you and the children can get me some fresh flowers this afternoon. She is to have the west corner room."

Miss Folsom accordingly took the children on this mission, and herself arranged and placed the flowers.

The next day she met Miss Wilton in the hall. It was the first time since they had boarded together at Mrs. Miller's, and Bessie was confirmed in her determination to avoid meeting her, as far as pos-

sible. Lilla had made a point of addressing her courteously, but her instincts were somehow not satisfied.

"You have met Miss Wilton before?" asked Mrs. Meredith one day, having noticed something peculiar in Bessie's manner.

"Yes," said Miss Folsom with discreet reticence.

It was not hard for the children's governess to keeep out of Miss Wilton's way, but it was quite impossible for her to avoid hearing her mentioned many times a day. Every morning she heard from the housekeeper at what hour Elsa was to carry up her mistress' cup of tea; the preparation of Miss Wilton's bath was always distinctly heard in the school-room; and, somehow, after having thus unwillingly assisted at the various stages of Lilla's daily restoration to society, Miss Folsom found her mood not always gracious when they sometimes culminated in an intrusion into her realm.

Almost any fair-minded spectator would have been pleased to see the morning freshness and charm of Miss Wilton's demi-toilet, and the delight with which the children hailed the short recess which her caresses won for them. To Miss Folsom's small acolytes, Lilla was a beautiful princess, before whose smile the stern duties of life released their hold, and the thunders of the law, throned on Miss Folsom's forehead, were unaccountably veiled for a time. To do Miss Wilton justice, she never stayed more than a few moments on such occasions, nor betrayed further notice of Bessie's silent dignity than a slight smile might convey.

Soon other guests began to arrive, and every evening there was some festivity. The singing to the guitar, the talk and laughter, were plainly audible to Bessie as she sat by her open window. She thought of the remark she had made to Willcox, refusing to accept her life at a low valuation. Her longing had always been to be with people nicer than herself rather than the reverse, that she might not degenerate too far from what her mother had been. Where were these nice people?

"Not below there on the piazza," she thought, hearing Miss Wilton's somewhat loud voice above the others. "I certainly don't care to enter a society where she shines. I must have lived a former life with some very delightful people; or is it books that give one such an exalted standard?"

A burst of laughter from below startled her, and she knelt on the window-seat to see if any part of the piazza were visible. She heard Mrs. Meredith speaking now. She was really the only one in the house whom Bessie cared in the least for. Even by leaning out she could not see the piazza, but she saw the green lawn, the trees lighted by Japanese lanterns from the house; she saw through a break in the trees the flush of the late sunset and a bit of the ocean itself, now a dark purple; above, she saw the dark blue sky and the evening star.

"I wish Hattie were here," she sighed. "Mr. Willcox, I suppose, would look at that by the hour and not notice it."

She laughed at the thought of his similar blindness on the Walpole hills, and then grew sober as

she reflected that she herself had been the cause of his preoccupation. It had seldom been easy for Bessie to care as much for the society of others as for the delights of such a scene as was now before her. But to-night she recognized dimly what Madame Swetchine long ago discovered on the shores of the "admirable" gulf of Naples, that the beautiful does little but awake a further need in us.

"In vain do we ask ourselves by what mystery of ingratitude admiration is not sufficient for us, if we must have everything to enjoy a little; suffering is, perhaps, our only answer."

One of the guests, Mr. Stanton, Bessie had watched with ever increasing admiration for his good looks. He was a great deal with Miss Wilton, and it would have been from that quarter that Bessie would have expected developments, had it not been for an odious and elderly gentleman named Schenck, who came often to the house, and whose manner towards Miss Wilton was far more attentive than Stanton's. In spite of his age, he had the airs and alertness of a much younger man, and if anything could have increased Bessie's disgust with Miss Wilton, it would have been to see her go to drive in his dog-cart, or stroll with him under the beech-trees on the lawn.

It may be that Mrs. Meredith shared Bessie's dislike to these proceedings. She certainly watched matters closely, and sometimes took occasion to interrupt their interviews. Lilla was not as friendly as usual with her, and she was the more pleased to see her come to her room late one afternoon as if to

have a talk. Mrs. Meredith gave her an easy-chair, and soon Lilla brought out, with her customary directness, the object of her coming.

"Do you think I am very necessary to this play?" she asked. "I would far rather not act at all, though I am quite ready to help in any other way."

Mrs. Meredith was much surprised.

"If that is your feeling, I think it is not too late to arrange it some other way. Hetty would take it, if necessary. It will be a general disappointment, though. Your fame has traveled here from New York."

"That play was quite different. I am not really much of an actress, but the part suited me from the first. This one I am tired to death of already. My fame would be dissipated forever, if I tried to undertake it."

"I will see Mr. Kneller at once."

Mrs. Meredith was silent a few moments, then went on.

"I wish Mr. Seton was to be here. He was invaluable at the other performance. I wrote to him, but I fear he will not be able to come. He 's a fine fellow, is n't he? I am really just beginning to know him."

"It would be a piece of luck for Mr. Seton to marry some very homely and sensible girl."

"Why homely, dear? Why not beautiful and sensible?"

"Simply because no one thinks of plainly loving a beautiful woman. The phenomenon has never been observed."

Mrs. Meredith looked at her with an expression of pity. She answered, however, lightly, —

"Does not Tom love me? Or, do you mean to imply" —

"Does he love you steadily and equally, well or ill, rosy or haggard?"

Mrs. Meredith laughed, well-contented.

"You are a complete heathen, my dear; an outsider, a barbarian, as to the matter of love."

"I know more than you think. I have not lived my wandering life for nothing. How do you expect me to believe in men's love when precious few of them believe in their own? And even if a few of them do, *I* don't. They start from the wrong side. They with all their protesting are not worth the sacrifice of an hour's comfort."

"You are wrong, utterly wrong," cried Mrs. Meredith indignantly. "Men are worth all the sacrifices that a feeble-natured being like woman could know how to make. It is they who carry on without complaint all the business and all the arts of this great world. It is they who give their labor and their love freely to their wives and children, never thinking even to call it a sacrifice. Women are the weaklings whose fault-findings are forever being heard. Men have no one to complain to, but silently take on their shoulders the burden of all. Indeed, Lilla, you are so steady and strong and large-minded that you do not see all that is usually true of women. They *are* narrow. They *are* satisfied with little ends and trifling occupation. Some few, perhaps, are smitten with a great idea; then they spend their

lives staggering under it, now wildly enthusiastic and now weakly despairing. I often think of a passage in the Bible, 'A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest.' That is what a man really is to a woman, there 's no use in denying it. There is no use either in pretending that women are always the angels and men the brutes. Women in this country get their ideas topsy-turvy on this matter, just because American men are so perfectly, unapproachably angelic."

Mrs. Meredith ended in such a burst of enthusiasm that a faint smile came to Lilla's preternaturally grave face.

She waited a moment and then said, —

"A man has his worth apart from all questions of love. I don't deny that. I think myself he is the interesting part of creation. I simply say that as regards a woman he is never worth one of her heartaches."

"If you were happily married, and had both sons and daughters, you would not talk as if men and women were of different blood, when they are interwoven through their whole nature. I can wish you no higher happiness, dear, than this double consciousness, this claim on all life."

"It 's pretty certain that I shall never marry a man I care for."

"You are free never to marry one you don't."

"Oh, yes," said Lilla, rising, a little annoyed, "very free. Everything will be my own fault. That 's the advantage of being a moral being."

Preparations were being made for the play. Almost any morning one or two of the actors might be seen strolling about the grounds, holding small pamphlets behind their backs, and the stage was being decorated in a roomy outbuilding. It was harder than usual, with this excitement in the air, to keep the children at their work. One day especially, when Bessie had a slight headache, the school-room was twice invaded, and the lessons were nothing but painful confinement to both teacher and pupils. Mrs. Meredith had come first with a guest who had asked to see the children at their work. Another less welcome interruption was a message from Miss Wilton, asking if Miss Folsom would not come to her just before the noon rehearsal of the play. Bessie assented quietly, and after struggling a little longer to get some real application out of her scatter-witted scholars, she dismissed them with a sigh of relief and retired to her own room.

A little later she went to find Miss Wilton. She was not in her room, so Bessie put on her hat and went out to the carriage-house, which was to serve as theatre. At the entrance she had to pass a group of gay talkers, whose manner of dressing and laughing was not at all to her taste. Their conversation stopped as she passed. Inside there was no one unless on the stage, which was already hidden by the long folds of a dark-red curtain. In this half-lighted spot Miss Folsom hesitated and turned back. The group outside had resumed their laughing talk, and she heard a woman's voice say, as if in answer to some remark, —

"Like the mumps, it can't be concealed. Once a schoolmarm, always a schoolmarm."

At this unpleasant interpretation of the dignity with which she had passed them, Bessie could not face them again. She went to the stage and tried to part the curtain. A hand the other side assisted her, and she found herself face to face with Miss Wilton and next to the gentleman who had admitted her.

The stage was darkened from the outer day and not yet artificially lighted, but light from the green room streamed on to it. Actors in costume could be seen through the doorway; Miss Wilton, in negligé morning-dress, had thrown herself back in an armchair. Stanton, for he it was, had been happily engaged in disposing the stage furniture as well as the half-light would permit him.

"Why don't they light up?" Miss Wilton was lazily inquiring.

Stanton had paused at the sight of a stranger, but, finding he was not to be presented, he replied,

"Mr. Meredith has gone, I believe, for the electricity man. Kneller is tinkering with it now."

"Supposing," continued Lilla with great deliberation, as if talking were a severe effort, — "supposing you join Mr. Kneller and tinker also. I have a word to say to Miss Folsom."

At this moment the stage was lighted by brilliant globes from above. Stanton smiled at this success, but obediently left them alone, when Miss Wilton rose, her dress and figure thrown into startling effect, and moved towards Bessie. No greater con-

trast was destined to be presented on those boards than lay between these two women.

"I hope I have not put you to any inconvenience in asking you to find me."

Lilla's manner was soft and gracious, even beseeching. She continued in the same appealing way.

"I am going to ask a great favor of you, and, if you do not think it wise to grant it, perhaps I may, at least, trust to your forgetting that I asked it."

"I am glad to be of service to any of Mrs. Meredith's guests. I know very little, however, about theatricals."

"Oh, this is about some exceedingly private theatricals of my own. I have an errand which weighs a good deal on my mind, and which must be done to-day. I believe that you and the children drive out together in the afternoons, and I have made up my mind to beg you to take me too."

"That is the children's affair entirely, Miss Wilton. I will tell them your wish, and they will, no doubt, be overjoyed to invite you. My company is a very old story with them."

"But I want you too," said Miss Wilton with some alarm. "I know nothing about driving, and I shall have to leave you for a few minutes to do my errand."

"You probably have not seen the phaeton," said Bessie dryly. "It is really a children's carriage, and would not be suitable even if we left one of the children at home. There is no difficulty in your being taken where you wish, however. There are enough men, and horses, too, in the stable."

"I know that, Miss Folsom," returned Lilla with some displeasure. "I have myself, in fact, an engagement to drive. But my errand is indeed a private one, and I wanted the company of another woman only. I do not insist on the phaeton. However, I beg your pardon. I should not have troubled you."

She turned away with these words, and Bessie looked after her in perplexity, wondering if she were doing her duty towards Mrs. Meredith's guests.

"I should be glad to help you," she said quietly, and Miss Wilton did not miss the words, though moving away. "I do not think the phaeton would do. Perhaps I can take you in some other carriage."

Lilla turned back eagerly.

"Can you really? And the children?"

"They will go with their nurse."

"Thank you so much, Miss Folsom. Shall we say about four o'clock, then?"

"As it suits you. I must ask Mrs. Meredith for a carriage."

"Very well, only say it is for yourself, please. I will be strolling down towards the Stantons', and you can pick me up. What sort of a carriage will it be?"

"I am glad I am not made like that," thought Bessie. It took a moment for her to swallow her disgust, then she said, —

"A little canopied wagon, if Mrs. Meredith will let me have it. How far will your secret mission take you?"

"Not far. A few miles. Thank you."

Miss Folsom's resentment towards Lilla was by no means decreased when Mrs. Meredith asked mildly if she could not defer her errands till the theatricals were over.

"It is the running so constantly to meet the trains that tells on the horses. Still, if you really wish it — you ask so few favors" —

Miss Folsom was too loyal to her agreement to falter at this point.

"It *is* important," she said; "but, if it cannot be arranged, that is the end of it, of course."

"If it is important, it must be arranged," returned Mrs. Meredith with a delicate touch of humor about the lips,— an expression not unusual with her.

As Miss Folsom drove her little wagon out of the gate that afternoon, not even Willcox would have said that her appearance was affable. She had dressed herself in the most unadorned of gowns; her figure was uncompromisingly erect; and her lips were full of those decisive curves which meant no one quality, but were a vigorous expression of the totality known as Bessie Folsom. There was nothing disagreeable in this significance as long as one agreed with the principles lying behind it.

As she drew near the large lindens which showed the beginning of the Stanton estate, she saw Miss Wilton on the shady walk opposite, and drove her wagon very carefully along the gutter below the grassy bank. Lilla lowered her parasol and stepped in, with many expressions of gratitude for her punctuality. She could not but perceive Bessie's severe humor, but it did not in the least disquiet her. In

her light morning-dress, with white mull tied about her neck, and long mouse-colored gloves, she seemed dressed for the soft sunshine of the day. A brilliant red and yellow scarf mingled its hues with the folds of the mull.

Miss Folsom, after asking her driving directions, relapsed into silence, but Lilla supported the conversation with no embarrassment.

"There is a dog-cart at Mr. Stanton's door. If he is thrown out to-day by that black beast of his, the world will lose many exciting love-passages to-morrow."

"Do you know," she went on again, "I really envy you, Miss Folsom. There is nothing in my life of importance, except as I choose to think my own wishes of importance, and one has n't always the vigor to keep up that illusion. Whereas you are obliged, on the one hand, to look after yourself, and, as a consequence, find yourself involved in a busy, stirring family life. I suppose you never feel troubled, when a new day comes, for lack of a motive with which to set about it."

"As you say," returned Bessie, "I am kept busy earning my living."

"Then I am solitary in the world, while you probably have friends depending on you."

"Excuse me, Miss Wilton. I did not come out for the purpose of discussing my own affairs."

"Ah, of course not," said Lilla without the least concern. She smiled to herself as she leaned back in the carriage. The little governess was really amusing.

She soon started on another line of conversation, and though it was but one-sided, it made the drive seem short. They were well out in the open country north of Newport, and were passing what might be an old-fashioned inn. A quiet-looking bar-room opened on a garden. Miss Wilton seemed much interested in the quaintness of the structure. She made Bessie drive more slowly, and she leaned out to look back at it. Her brilliant neck handkerchief had been too warm for her, and she now held it in her hand.

"How much farther do we go?" asked Miss Folsom.

"I don't think it is far. I must look out for the house."

She looked carefully after this, and at last made Bessie stop in front of a large white house, with an old-fashioned flower garden at one side. She stepped out and went up the long walk. After holding a short conversation with the servant-girl who answered the bell, she came back and told Bessie that the family she wished to see had moved from Newport. It was hopeless to do anything more.

Miss Folsom was not in an amiable mood, and offered no commiseration. She turned the wagon about and started for home. While they were still in the shady reach of road that lay between them and the before-mentioned inn, Lilla gave an exclamation of surprise.

"I do believe that is some one I know. It is. It 's an old friend of mine. Please stop, Miss Folsom. I have n't seen him for years."

There was, in fact, a man approaching them, who lifted his hat with an expression of great surprise. He had short black hair and a crisp mustache. He was certainly not among the oldest of old friends.

"Mr. Terry," exclaimed Lilla. "It seems years since I have met you."

The new-comer's eye twinkled merrily at this greeting. He glanced at Bessie.

"Miss Folsom," began Lilla, "may I introduce"—

"It is not necessary," interrupted Miss Folsom in icy tones. "I noticed this morning that introductions were out of fashion."

For a moment Miss Wilton was staggered at the rebuff, but only for a moment.

"Then we will exchange a few words without disturbing you," she said, and alighting she walked slowly on with her new-found friend.

Bessie drove the wagon into the bushes by the side of the road, and, getting out, patted the horse and examined the harness to a needless extent. Meanwhile she was excessively angry, and, as the two passed out of sight, vented her wrath in various ejaculations and little snorts.

"The worst of it all," she thought, "is that they think me a confounded fool. Moved out of Newport, indeed! Would she have found the right house like that without inquiry? I have been made a cat's paw from first to last. However, I did it with my eyes open. She wanted the company of another woman only. Ugh!"

In her excessive disgust, Miss Folsom for a mo-

ment thought of driving after them and insisting on an immediate return, but as she was not prepared to leave Lilla alone in case she defied her authority, she did not wish to risk the threat. With these disquieting sentiments she was left alone for some time.

Meanwhile, Miss Wilton was not hurrying matters. She was looking at Mr. Terry, or Howard Raynor, to use his real name, with unaffected displeasure.

"You have compromised me in this matter. I gave you nothing for him. I gave you something for yourself, as you seemed to be in straits. I said expressly that nothing would induce me to give him a cent more."

"But he 's been precious short of cash, and would do almost anything. You would n't have got off from New York, if I had n't eased him up a little. Besides, I must make myself a trifle useful to him to keep his confidence."

Miss Wilton looked keenly at the young fellow. This sounded remarkably like double dealing, and yet she did not really believe that it was. Raynor's face was a peculiar one. At first his assurance and a certain superficial smartness had made her think him very shrewd. Now she began to interpret him more accurately, and to see the signs of weakness and light-headedness.

"He 's really been planning a descent upon Newport himself. I did everything I could to discourage it, but at last thought it part of my bargain to give you warning. He thinks I 'm doing it for

him, and if I don't take back anything, he 'll come himself."

"How did he know where I am?"

"I 'm afraid it was my fault, Miss Wilton. I let it out by mistake. Perhaps I had taken a glass too much myself. But then it 's in the papers; he might have seen it by looking."

"Then is he your tool, or are you his?"

There was a sudden silence; then Raynor said in a changed voice, —

"You must n't be too hard on me, if I am a fool. I am the kind of fool that broke his last bill to give you warning."

"There is one thing, Mr. Raynor, that you must understand once for all. I will not give him a single dollar, nor you a single dollar, if it goes from you to him."

Raynor looked dismayed.

"He means to come down here," he said anxiously. "Truly he does."

"He won't be such a fool. If he is, I do not care. Tell him from me that he may say what he likes and do what he likes, and never a penny more will he get from me or any one else. I hope I make myself plain."

"Very," said Raynor admiringly.

"Now what do you mean by saying that you broke your last bill to come here?"

"As it happens, the truth. I was fortunate to have one to break, for I had used most of what you gave me on Schreitenberger, and then I went to see my wife." Raynor stopped and frowned. "Well, she could have used it."

"Was it your wife who quarreled with you when you separated?" asked Lilla after a few moments.

"No, she was quite in the right."

"Then why did you quarrel?"

"Confound it, Miss Wilton, *that's* why we quarreled. There is nothing more exasperating than to have your wife always in the right. She's immensely literary and knowing. I have scarcely looked at the inside of a book. The more I did things to displease her, the more silent and scornful she became. I suppose some men can stand being forever second-rate in their wives' eyes. *I* can't. Besides, we had n't money enough to be happy, and never had."

"Then will you let me ask what induced you to think of marrying?"

"You may ask what you like, Miss Wilton. I want you to know the worst of me. Before marriage she did not show me how superior she was to me; that was one thing. Also she was willing to overlook the money question to some extent. If anything could make me disbelieve in matrimony, it would be the way in which it vulgarizes a woman. From the day after our engagement she began to be different. I am not faithless to what she used to be. She was a handsome woman, by Jove, she was, only three years ago. She would sit there, splendid in every line from the turn of her head to the sweep of her dress on the floor. A lover at her feet was something absolutely indispensable. If she had kept up her rôle, I would have kept up mine. She made not the least pretense of doing so. From the begin-

ning it was plans, cares, expenses, and nothing else. How could I remain on my knees before such a preoccupied goddess? and is it my fault if there are women who have not yet reached the marketing stage of existence? Now if ever I go near her," — his face darkened again,—"she treats me worse than a dog."

Miss Wilton listened gravely, with some surprise at his command of words, but she made no attempt to answer him.

"Well, Mr. Raynor," she said, "you have my message. If you will tell me what your traveling expenses have been, I will make it up to you."

Raynor hesitated.

"I will take nothing," he said in a low voice. "I have done you no good, and you may even think worse of me than that."

"I don't think worse of you than you say of yourself. You own to two faults which that scoundrel has not, — gambling and drinking."

"He drinks, Miss Wilton. Bless his little heart, I wish you could have seen him on Friday night. I never drink like that. That 's what I was afraid of, that he would get well plugged up and then come down here. He 's going fast to the dogs, that 's pretty plain. One of these days I can get him arrested as an escaped lunatic, he acts so queer. Gambling is another matter. It 's an intellectual joy. If you are really willing to let me have ten dollars, I 'll risk it in your name, and you shall have all the winnings."

"Risk it for yourself," said Miss Wilton, hand-

ing him the money. "You know I don't believe in it."

"It 's for the luck," said Raynor. "You won't mind my calling it yours. A novice brings luck."

"And if you know certainly," said Miss Wilton, looking steadily at him, "that Schreitenberger has a ticket for Newport, you send me a telegram."

"All right," said Raynor.

They walked back to the wagon, and Miss Folsom untied the horse and climbed in. Raynor helped Miss Wilton in and raised his hat.

"Good-by," said Miss Wilton.

"Go 'long," was Bessie's sole remark, as she touched the horse with the whip.

Miss Folsom spoke to no one of this adventure. The day was approaching when she could return to Miss Granger, and she was very glad. She did not know that Miss Wilton would be the first to leave.

She was standing one day by the window of the upper hall, as Stanton drove up in his dog-cart. His dress was always perfection; "such perfection, that is," as she justly remarked to herself, "as a man may affect without becoming a despicable fop." His face was handsome with a beauty which the flowers in his buttonhole made appear the more masculine by contrast. The perfection of his physical proportions was simply dazzling.

"How I should like to see him in top-boots!" was her fervent ejaculation.

Now he was standing by his cart, helping Miss Goldthwait to step into it. Her dress swept across his foot. He did not resent the indignity, but, him-

self equally regardless of the magnificent symmetry with which he was framed, threw all into action for the small purposes of the moment.

Bessie heaved a deep sigh as he drove off.

"I should lose my head entirely if I were sitting by such a man. It is joy enough just to look at him." As she turned from the window, Mrs. Meredith passed her and asked, —

"What is it?"

"Miss Goldthwait," said Bessie with commendable agility of tongue.

"Mr. Stanton is taking her to drive?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Meredith came to the window and looked after them.

"Miss Folsom," she said, "I am glad to tell you as early as any one of the events of last night. My sister is engaged to Mr. Stanton."

"Oh, how nice!" cried Bessie with enthusiasm. "You must be delighted; he is such a fine fellow."

"I hope he is. My husband thinks very well of him. I suppose a sister is the last one to feel sure."

"Another one gone," said Bessie to herself. "That is always my luck. 'To love and then to lose.'"

"But," added Mrs. Meredith, "I came to ask you to take a message for me. Miss Wilton has received a telegram which makes it necessary for her to return to New York. Will you kindly send word to the stable to send up the phaeton in time for the 12.45 train? The children and I will drive down with her."

CHAPTER XII.

At the end of June, as Miss Folsom was determined to return to Miss Granger, Mrs. Meredith had to let her go. The children were to accompany her to the station, and their mother came to the door to see them off.

"Remember," she said to Bessie, as she shook hands with her very cordially, "I shall always be delighted if you find yourself at liberty to come to me again. The children need the management you give them. They are too unruly for the usual stamp of French governess."

That evening Bessie drove up to Miss Granger's door in the best of spirits. She had not written on what day she should return, and she found that her friend was still out. She went to her own room and changed her dress. Then she trimmed the lamp in the sitting-room, and went about changing the position of the furniture to suit herself.

Mary Ann, the servant-girl, her conscience awakened by the return of the sharp-eyed member of the household, presented herself timidly and dusted the music-stand and mantel-shelf. Before long they heard the closing of the front door.

"Now go," said Miss Folsom, as she threw herself into a chair and caught up a book.

Miss Granger came so slowly up the two flights

that if Bessie had been industrious she might have read several pages. She sat looking intently a few inches above her book, and did not stir as Miss Granger entered and dropped her packages on a chair. She waited a long moment till her friend turned and uttered a breathless, "Why, who is that?" and then she jumped up and rushed into her arms.

"Bessie, my little darling," cried Miss Granger, hugging her in her delight; "you have really come back to me?"

"Did you think you were rid of me for good?" said Bessie, her face radiant.

"I thought you might not come till to-morrow."

"Spending to-night in the streets, I suppose? Come, take off your cloak, Hattie."

"I must look at you first. How well you are looking, little woman! Are you sure you are equal to the sacrifice of living with me again?"

"Quite sure, and particularly anxious to begin my self-immolation by a good supper. Where are your cousins? All gone?" added Bessie, as they passed into the dining-room.

"Yes."

"And what is the news? How is the painting going on? Who has called?"

"There is n't any news, and no one has called. Perhaps you will call it news, however, that I have seen again that magnificent-looking woman who used to be at Mrs. Miller's."

"You mean Miss Wilton, I suppose. Where have you seen her?"

"She is again at Mrs. Miller's. I was there last night and spoke with Mr. Willcox. She came into the sitting-room while I was there, and I left them talking."

Bessie was quiet for a few moments. Then she dismissed from her mind the picture Miss Granger had brought before her, and with a smile passed her plate for some cream-toast.

"This, I believe, is what you call self-sacrifice," she said, glancing with satisfaction around the cosy supper-room.

"It never looks like this when you are away, dear. How could I have let you go?"

"Even for a cousin?"

"Even for a cousin," returned Miss Granger.

Miss Wilton had really been asking business advice of Willcox. It had come about without serious design on her part, but since this interview Willcox had been giving much thought to the few astounding statements then made to him. The evening after Miss Folsom's return, he sat with his long legs drawn up under him like a school-boy, and when Miss Wilton came through the room he put out his hand to detain her, and uttered some words of sympathy. Lilla smiled, and took a seat.

"It is all right now, or will be when I begin to get rent in the autumn for the apartment I have underlet. Of course at present I have been forced to borrow on whatever terms I could."

"But, Miss Wilton, at eight per cent. a month! Whose hands have you fallen into?"

Lilla flushed a little.

"I did not say, I paid eight per cent. a month."

"You said you paid one hundred and twenty dollars a month for a loan of fifteen hundred dollars."

"Well, I 've done it now."

"You have indeed. Would it be impossible for you to borrow the same amount of friends at a reasonable rate, and thus be rid of this summer's interest?"

"Three hundred and sixty dollars is n't much. Besides, I have been a borrower for some time, and am the worse off for it. But this is due partly to a rather unfortunate matter, now, I hope, well off of my hands. Don't give yourself anxiety about *me*, Mr. Willcox."

"But it must drive you nearly frantic to be followed about by small debts and unpaid bills. Excuse me, Miss Wilton. You yourself gave me your confidence. Why will you not borrow at least enough to cover these?"

"If you had tried borrowing, you might know why."

Willcox looked much distressed.

"If you are really set on living economically and ridding yourself of debt, you ought to be able to find help."

He hesitated, and made one or two false starts before he was able to go on.

"I will — I might be willing to lend you part of the sum you named. I could n't put my hand just now on the whole, but say five hundred dollars, or perhaps more. Yes, I think I could let you have more. Money is a living thing, Miss Wilton; pow-

erful, and dangerous to handle till you know how to do it. If you will but be careful, I think a year might see you free of all indebtedness."

"What a wretch I should be if I took you at your word, Mr. Willcox!"

"I think you have now learned so hard a lesson that you will use this money rightly."

"You are a remarkable man. I shall remember your offer. It would require, in fact, a more vigorous intellect than mine to forget it. But, for the present, I and the money-lenders — if I must be classed with such rascals, I will at least give myself the priority — will worry along a little longer without injuring honest people."

Willcox would have spoken still more earnestly, but Miss Wilton cut him short with some brusqueness.

"Don't tempt me any more, for it is a temptation. Tell me about the boarders here; so many have left."

"Miss Laval has inherited some money; she lives with some cousins now, not far away."

"That is delightful; she did look so poor and thin. Then Miss Granger?"

"She was here the other day, you remember. She and Miss Folsom live together. Usually, that is; Miss Folsom has been at Newport recently."

"Yes, I know," said Lilla. "She was at Mrs. Meredith's, where I was visiting."

"It is very pleasant there, is it not? She was looking forward to it."

There was a subdued humility in Willcox's manner which Lilla did not fail to notice.

"It was very pleasant for every one," she answered. "Miss Folsom used to drive out regularly. She is very fond of that."

"Yes, I believe she is."

"Mrs. Meredith said she had great tact in managing the children. I think she must have come back now. Do you know? Have you called?"

"No," said Willcox, startled by the abruptness of the question. "I don't call; or, rather, I have n't for some time."

The next day, as Lilla was going downstairs, she met Bessie Folsom. The latter nodded so stiffly that Miss Wilton was about to pass her with a simple bow of recognition, when a sudden recollection made her pause and speak to her.

"You have returned, then, Miss Folsom. I was debating the point with Mr. Willcox last night. He has gone to New Hampshire to-day. Perhaps you have not heard the news."

"No," said Bessie. She wanted to add that the news would probably not concern her, but the words did not utter themselves.

"He has very alarming letters about his mother. She has had a stroke of paralysis and probably cannot live long."

A sudden fierce anger leaped into Bessie's heart. She wondered if she had really felt any sympathy, so soon was it swallowed up by resentment. Miss Wilton might, if she liked, be the confidant of every idler in Newport, but why must she be the first to know the private news of Mr. Willcox?

Lilla, watching her closely, misunderstood her feeling.

"I did not mean," she said, "to presume on your interest in all the members of our household. Mr. Willcox is such an unusual man, so full of kindness to us all, that every one feels very sorry for him."

"Of course," said Miss Folsom, in an unnatural voice. "It is very sad."

As Miss Wilton went on, Bessie could have thrown herself on the stairs and cried with pain and mortification. One seldom does that in public places, however. She made her call upstairs on the Misses Miller, and spent the afternoon and evening quietly. At bed-time she had somewhat forgotten her own resentment in the thought of the sadness that hung over that far-away New Hampshire home, and the tears that fell were of a softer nature than would have fallen in the morning. She remembered Willcox's description of his home, as they sat on the hills at Walpole. He had wished that she could know his mother. He would never have said such a thing to Miss Wilton. She knew only what was known by all the household. She laughed strangely to herself over all his awkward, helpless ways in her presence, and recalled almost word for word how he had told, that day at Walpole, of the childlike, unclouded happiness he took in the mere fact of being near her. He was not the kind of man to change. It flashed on her mind for a moment that, if she had acted differently since that day, she might now be going with him to the bedside of his mother. The idea was too strange to be dwelt upon, and she managed to satisfy herself that

without much expense to her own feelings she could retain the sovereignty his reverence gave her and be worshiped in silence. Still, just now she would like to do something to comfort him; he was so good. She cried quietly from time to time in all the soft luxury of pity for him and for herself, and at last fell asleep.

Going again two days later to see her friends, she learned to her surprise that Willcox had returned. His mother was out of immediate danger. She at once determined to see him if possible and express her sympathy. She would not like to seem heartless. She waited in Mrs. Miller's office till he had come in, and then sent little Maggie down to ask him to come up to her.

It was a few minutes before he did so, and the delay rather pleased her, for she imagined him picking up courage at the foot of the stairs. She was curious to examine again in the light of her Newport experience what it was that made him so awkward. When he did at last appear, she herself was the one to lose her composure, and did not fully recover herself till they were sitting in opposite armchairs, and he was making a remark to the effect that he was glad to see her again. He did not seem embarrassed, nor, on the other hand, preoccupied with sadness.

Finding that she gave no reason for sending for him, he gave her an account of her brother. Tom had been transferred to another office of the same company, and was doing well.

"He is developing very fast," concluded Willcox,

"both as a business man and a gentleman. I have to mind my *p's* and *q's* with him now."

Miss Folsom had been watching him with amazement. He neither hitched his chair about, nor twisted his feet. Indeed, he did not seem very much in earnest. She made an effort to collect herself and said: —

"I did not hear till two days ago, Mr. Willcox, how very ill your mother has been. It made me wish to see you and tell you how sorry I am. I remember so well what you told me of her at Walpole. It all seems so fearfully sad."

"She is much better now, you know," said Willcox, as if surprised, "though, of course, liable any day to another attack. I think," he added consolingly, "that such things are sometimes more depressing to an outsider than to those concerned. I have seen sadder things during the few hours I have been in New York than I did at home. I mean that while death, and nearness to death, are by themselves sorrowful things to think of, they can be wholly transformed by being connected with some one who has won the victory over them."

Miss Folsom listened without quite understanding. What she was most conscious of was that he was, as it were, warding off any expression of her sympathy. She was grieved, and changed the subject somewhat abruptly.

"I believe Miss Wilton is boarding here again now."

"Yes," said Willcox. "She actually went to a prayer-meeting with me the other day. Can you

imagine any one doing that?" he added, smiling half sadly.

"I can imagine Miss Wilton doing it."

Willcox made no answer to this hot exclamation. He even dared to seem absent-minded.

"Was it a good meeting?" demanded Bessie. His ruminating expression was something she could not endure.

"Yes; a good, earnest meeting. There was much, I suppose, that would not have pleased you. I am accustomed to it, and Miss Wilton was not in a critical vein."

"Am I always in that vein?"

"In religious matters I think you are."

Even the obtuse Willcox could not but see that this remark wounded Miss Folsom deeply.

"I ought not to say that," he said quickly. "You have expressed some dislike to our Baptist form of worship, that was all I meant to say."

"Anything that can be a rest and comfort to you now, I ought not to find fault with. You have really misunderstood me, Mr. Willcox. Perhaps I spoke hastily."

Then, gathering courage and composure she went on.

"While I am in the way of apology, I must apologize for what I said to you at my own door, shortly before I left for Newport. I was really rude. I wonder you did not laugh in my face when I put on such airs. As we may not meet much, I want to make sure now that you do not think me altogether a fool."

Miss Folsom rose as she spoke, and took her gloves from the table. She pulled her veil over her face, such a thick veil that Willcox could scarcely see the two gray eyes fixed on him. For the first time he looked troubled, and, rising, nearly upset a table of photographs.

"Miss Folsom," he began, in an almost awe-struck tone, "you must not speak that way, for you were altogether in the right. You can scarcely know how grateful I must always be to you for what you said that day."

Bessie looked at him, struck by the expression. What could he mean? Suspicions that she had not before formulated to herself began to grow distinct in her mind. Was it possible that Miss Wilton thought it worth while to inveigle and delude this poor fellow? It was fortunate that her face was hidden; her voice betrayed nothing as she replied,

"If you care to have me understand that remark, you will have to explain it."

"It might displease you," stammered Willcox, gazing at the veiled eyes and compressed lips.

"It will not."

"You could not have guessed how foolish I was, and it is possible that some lucky accident might have made me wiser, but at one time, if you had not shown me plainly how much you were above me, I think I might have allowed myself to wish for — very impossible things."

"Oh, you *might* have, you think," repeated Bessie, utterly dumfounded.

Willcox colored all over his face up to the roots

of his sandy hair. He thought she was ridiculing him. He remained silent till the flush gradually left his cheek. At last he said: —

"It was n't really necessary to drive the iron home like that. I had no reason to be ashamed of what I felt then, and you have no reason now. I think I do not need to be spoken to more than once."

"Excuse me," said Bessie. She slid her fingers along the open door as if to find the way out. The little hand which Willcox knew so well touched a chord in him which the whole interview till now had missed. He had meant to recover himself and add a few words in obedience to a former request of hers, which had gone very close to his heart, that he should act as a friend and make things easy for her. For the moment he could say nothing, so vividly were old feelings suggested by that small representative of her perfections. As he followed her downstairs, however, he regained control of himself, and said cheerfully: —

"Your brother is to come here to-morrow night. Have you any message for him?"

"Oh, is he coming here? He takes tea with us first, but said he had an engagement for the evening. Now why won't you have your talk at our house, and then we can have a hand of whist afterwards."

"Thank you, I fear that will not do. We have papers and figures to compare. You would find us very stupid."

"You may have all the time you wish," said Miss Folsom good-humoredly, "and if Miss Granger and

I disturb you, you can take your papers into the dining-room."

Willcox felt strangely averse to accepting this invitation, but before he could frame a sufficient excuse, they were both startled by the suddenly noisy tone of a conversation which had been before audible in the little reception-room near them.

"That is Miss Wilton's voice, and something is going wrong," said Willcox. "I really think I will knock. Whoever the man is, he has forgotten his manners."

"Must you interfere?" asked Bessie, somewhat frightened.

"I think so."

"Tell me first that you will take tea with us to-morrow?"

"Tea!" said Willcox, alarmed. "You did not say tea before."

"That was what I meant," said Bessie inexorably. "Have you any engagement?"

"No, of course not. You are very kind."

Willcox was thankful when she had gone, and he could go to Miss Wilton's assistance. He was bold here, and opened the door without knocking. Lilla gave him a smile as he entered, and he took it as a welcome and closed the door behind him.

It was Schreitenberger who stood by the window, but he was no longer clean, and had lost his look of prosperity. A few months of New York temptations with money in his pocket had very much changed him. Whatever had been the outbreak heard by Willcox outside, the victory had evidently

remained with Miss Wilton, for the German looked cowed and disheartened. He glanced at Willcox sullenly, and dropped into a whining and begging tone.

"I shall go to the dogs, if you will do nothing for me. This country is too wicked for me. My money is all gone. I don't know where I shall sleep to-night."

Lilla set her teeth together.

"If you think you 've made a friend of me, you have a queer idea of human nature. I don't know why I don't send for a policeman now, but I give you the chance to go off this once more."

Schreitenberger looked around the room with a pitiful air of weakness. Then he came shuffling towards Willcox.

"Give a fellow a little something for a supper and a bed."

Miss Wilton interfered, as a thought had suddenly occurred to her.

"You have just a little information which I am willing to pay for. If you will answer one or two questions straightforwardly I will give you a dollar bill, and more if you answer freely and clearly."

Schreitenberger looked greedily at her.

"Did Howard Raynor give you my present address?"

Schreitenberger gazed at her in perplexity. The name had apparently no meaning for him. Lilla in her turn was bewildered. Raynor's tales could not have been pure invention. Ah, he went under false names, perhaps.

"Who was the man whom you sent after me to Newport?" she asked.

"We call him Jake. I don't know his whole name."

"Well, then, did Jake give you my address here?"

Schreitenberger laughed cunningly.

"No, Jake is behind the times. He knew you had left Newport, but said it was for a visit in the country. It was I who found out."

"And how did you find out?"

The man hesitated.

"A two-dollar bill now for a fair answer."

"I know the money-lender to whom you pay money every month, and he told me."

"Ah," said Miss Wilton significantly. She was pleased to find that her very questionable acquaintance was at least not playing a double game with her. "Now go, and you know what will happen if you venture to come near me again."

Willcox opened the door, and Schreitenberger, taking his money, shuffled meekly out of the house. Miss Wilton showed no inclination to offer information as to this unusual visitor, and Willcox had no wish to know more of him. So after they had exchanged a few desultory remarks, they separated, without referring to the scene just ended.

Miss Wilton was apparently resigning herself to a very quiet life. For a time her friends seemed to have forgotten her completely. They were, of course, out of town, but she did not even hear from them; and she could not but think how easily a

woman like herself, without family or connections, could drop wholly out of knowledge. She found her room comfortable and her food satisfactory. Her extravagances had always been in the way of dress rather than food, her one weakness in the latter line being confectionery. Even the intense summer heat she took philosophically: it gave an added zest to the economical pleasures of the toilet. Economy, strange to say, was now her absorbing thought. She showed an unwonted interest in accounts, and would sit lost in reflection over a deficit of fifty cents. In the evening she delighted to calculate with Willcox how soon this method of living would restore her to solvency. As she was naturally hopeful in her estimates, Willcox did not give full expression to his own uneasiness; but he could not understand how she would be able to meet the bills she confessed to him, while he knew there were others as to which she kept her counsel. She was now, however, living as she should, and he could not but be touched that the slight kindness he had shown her had been so strong an influence with her for good.

On a hot Saturday in July, Lilla stood at her window, looking at the dusty street and its few dejected wayfarers. Even at five in the afternoon the sun showed no sign of relenting, yet she imagined that by going to the nearest avenue she might find a stirring of life in the air; she was becoming very tired of the house. She did not stop to change the blue and white cambric waist she had worn since morning, nor even undertook the weary task of putting

on gloves; but taking a broad-brimmed hat and a sunshade she slipped out, quite sure she would meet no one she knew, unless one of Mrs. Miller's household in similar simplicity of dress.

The avenue was disappointing, as the sun lay still upon it, and the air seemed utterly worn out. Lilla's attention was attracted by a woman of about her own age, but apparently of a far sadder history, and she followed her into a cross-street to examine her more closely. After a short walk the two entered another street of very poor aspect. The roadway was sprinkled with foot-passengers, and the languid air was filled with clatter and cries, these sharp sounds being the forlorn substitutes to city ears for the murmuring of leaves and brooks. On one side of the street was a dancing academy and a saloon, on the other, a so-called female boarding-house, with cheap meals advertised in the windows. Here the object of Lilla's curiosity entered by the basement door, and she was left wondering whether the face that had so struck her was bearing the marks of some tragedy of shame, or the much commoner traces of self-will and bad temper.

As she stood there, much jostled by the passers-by, a little urchin of four years, in a short red dress and a pinafore once white, fell flat on his face from no apparent cause and lay motionless and howling. Lilla instinctively bent and raised him to his knees, and then discovered that his general griminess was much complicated by a severe nose-bleed, while further causeways down his cheeks were furrowed by his little tears. No one came to his rescue, or even

paused to look at him, and Lilla continued to stand by him, extremely unwilling to touch him again, and wondering how much the sacrifice of a handkerchief would effect on such a face. At last his sobs were too much for her, and she knelt and mopped away blood and tears together, and tried to soothe him.

As she was thus occupied, she heard a familiar voice say: —

"May I take your little boy just inside out of the heat till he feels better?" and looking up she saw Arnold Robertson.

Lilla was the first to recover from her surprise.

"Thank you, I wish you would," she said, smiling.

Robertson's face was a study, and his words failed him. He stooped and lifted the child, who stopped crying at once, and led the way across the street to a house of decent appearance with green plants in the windows. Here with a key he opened a room on the ground floor. Then he went for cold water and washed the child's face, and in the cupboard found a sweet cracker, which proved a great consolation.

"Do look at your sleeve, Mr. Robertson!"

"I am looking at yours."

Lilla looked at herself and laughed.

"He does seem to go around pretty well. Do you know him?"

"I think not individually. He seems to know me, so I imagine he has a brother in my boys' club. He is much more easily accounted for than you."

Lilla explained where she was living, and asked to be shown over the house, two stories of which, the

basement and ground floor, were used for multifarious purposes, — classes, clubs, and social meetings.

"Saturday is a great day here, but you are just too late for the last performances. Early in the afternoon we have primary-school children. I have just now attended a business meeting of the boys' club, and have been voted down in two important propositions. Fortunately, my position is not dependent on a parliamentary majority, and all I have to do is to yield gracefully; but I am meditating a house-to-house canvass. The crisis seems to me serious, and my schemes were hardly considered on their merits, owing to pressure of business."

"The club deals with weighty matters, then."

"Very. They rank in importance somewhere between state and national in the opinion of most of us."

"And what were your two propositions?"

"One concerned the eligibility to reëlection of members expelled for misconduct. The club practices a Roman severity at present, and I, who have an eye to its number and financial success as well as its purity, have been pleading on the side of mercy. The other proposition was, perhaps, too new to be carried at once. I wished to abolish the present fines on bad language and other misdemeanors committed in the club-rooms. The matter is becoming too financial, and the charm of expensiveness is added to that of manliness in the use of strong language. My motion, however, was most overwhelmingly voted down. I think some thought it a test of their virtue."

Miss Wilton listened with interest, and said as he paused: —

"Is n't it discouraging to see how little impression is made in a neighborhood by any number of efforts? how few are really changed by it?"

Robertson was silent for a few moments.

"What do you understand that I am working for?"

"Well, to speak of it from the outside, I suppose to do away with drunkenness and crime and bring in the love of education, and so lead to more prosperous material conditions."

"Those objects are good, but judged by them I am not much of a success."

"You do get an influence over these boys."

"I hope so to some degree, but virtue is an indigenous plant, and one can't flatter one's self too much if a fair chance makes a fine lad. To my mind, life itself is a success, and the more it is shared with, the more it deserves the name of life."

The small sufferer here demanded another cracker, and after he was supplied Lilla tried to make him tell her his name or address. She made out his name at last, and Robertson found his probable address from his books; then, after they had sat for a time breathing the cooler air which now began to draw through the open windows, they closed the house, and Robertson took the child by the hand to lead him home. As they reached the street, he said: —

"You will find your way here again, will you not? I gave you our schedule of classes. You will be

welcome at everything except the children's business meetings, which are private."

"May I see Miss Brigham's evening sewing-class?"

"Indeed you may, if you can come here in the evening. I will give you a card of introduction to Miss Brigham, though it really is not necessary."

He wrote a line on his card, then looking at her with evident friendliness he lifted his hat, and so they parted.

Lilla made her way home in a confusion of thoughts. He had certainly changed; perhaps had not improved in politeness of the conventional order, as he thought it more important to take that small ragamuffin home than to care for her in a similar way. But he had been patient with her, had cared to explain what he was doing, and had told her that life itself was a success. Really, she had not seen much that looked like success, except the untroubled peacefulness of his eyes.

The next week she went to one of Miss Brigham's evening classes. It was a sewing-class, and she immediately became temporary assistant. After the little girls had left, she had some conversation with Miss Brigham, an energetic but careworn woman of perhaps forty years. The latter said that they needed help chiefly on Sundays; their Sunday-school was overflowing, and most of their week-day helpers were then busy elsewhere. She wished Lilla would come in on Sundays.

"I don't want to teach in Sunday-school," said Lilla decidedly.

"Well," returned Miss Brigham, "we are glad to have you come in when you like. Sundays it 's mostly keeping the boys in order. They come in in crowds and are inclined to be rough, but we can't turn them away."

Lilla went away reflecting on these words. The proposal was not in the least attractive to her. She wished she could ask Mr. Robertson if he thought her fit to teach in a Sunday-school. It was such an odd idea, but then all her life was odd of late. The boarders were odd, and for some reason she took much interest in them, in the Miller girls' musical education, in Mr. Thomson's gout, in Mrs. Thomson's prolonged experiences with the dentist. All these things touched her sense of humor, and one day when Howard Raynor's name was brought to her, she laughed aloud. His acquaintance was the oddest feature of the situation.

Raynor was, as it were, a survival of the time when she had allowed Schreitenberger to frighten her. Why he should continue to concern himself with her affairs, she did not know, and often resented being called down to speak to him. Yet he was so amusing, and accounted for his reappearances in such ingenious ways, that so far she had not put a stop to them.

She was returning to her room from one of these odd interviews, when Mrs. Miller called her into her office, and asked her to take a chair. Mrs. Miller was usually a great talker, her Irish vivacity breaking through an exterior which showed the Anglo-Saxon stock. With Miss Wilton, however, she had

never been talkative. She now turned her back for a few moments, asking a few questions about Willcox, then faced about abruptly and handed Lilla a small case.

"I have a miniature I should like you to see," she said briefly. "It is of a Miss Hastings."

Lilla looked up at her quickly, then down again.

"It cannot be my mother," she said almost inaudibly.

"No; your Aunt Clara."

"I thought," said Lilla, "that there was only my mother and my Uncle John."

"If your mother had lived, you would have known of Clara. Your father, I dare say, was very willing to forget her. She ran away with her lover to Ireland. We will charitably suppose that she expected to be married to him before sailing; she was not, however. My mother and your mother went after her, and it was on this trip that the former first met my father, who, as you perhaps know, was an Irishman."

"I used to have a little sister Clara," said Lilla, still in a low voice.

"Yes, named before this happened."

"But why," said Lilla, foreseeing further revelations,—"why did your mother go with mine?"

"Because they were own cousins and intimate friends."

A silence followed this announcement.

"Then you knew we were related when you first saw me?"

"Yes."

"Why!" said Lilla, suddenly recollecting herself. "Laura Kelway said you were her cousin."

"Distantly, yes. Your father's partnership with Mr. Kelway was due to his wife's relationship."

Lilla sat looking at the miniature.

"Did you put off telling me because you thought I would not like it?"

"Partly that," said Mrs. Miller, discreetly suppressing more prudential reasons.

"You need not have thought so," said Lilla slowly. "It is better to earn your own living than to" — She was about to add, "run into debt," till her own situation occurred to her.

"Than to steal it," finished Mrs. Miller scornfully. "Yes, I agree with you."

"And what became of my Aunt Clara?"

"When she was found, she was already deserted. She would not return to America, but settled in Ireland. She is probably dead by this time."

"I must think all this over. Perhaps this evening or to-morrow you will tell me what you know of my mother. *She* was good and sweet?"

"Indeed she was," said Mrs. Miller more softly. She herself had known these facts for so long that she had not allowed for the effect on Lilla of this revelation of kinship and the familiar talk of events long ago buried in silence. She had risen to leave when she noticed in Lilla's eyes the signs of rising tears. A sudden kindliness leaped up in her warm Irish heart, and with a surprised ejaculation of "Dear child," she put her arms about her.

The immediate object of Mrs. Miller's disclosure

was shown that evening by her free expression of opinion as to Raynor's character, and of her wish that he should not again be admitted to the house. Lilla was very docile, agreed with her in her estimate of this disreputable hanger-on, but asked for time, as he had rendered her more than one service, and she had no right to be rude to him. Mrs. Miller agreed to the delay, being already agreeably surprised at Lilla's amiability.

After a great deal of reflection, Lilla decided to present herself at Miss Brigham's Sunday-school, and see if she could be of some service in seating the children and holding them in order. This would not make her responsible for the teaching. It amused her much to find herself actually on the way there; she wondered how long this philanthropic fit of hers would probably last. Every succeeding Sunday she wondered anew, for she continued to go; and this in spite of the fact that she had to teach a small class as well as help manage a large one. Very little originality was required of her. The school differed from the few she had known about. It was held at the club-rooms every Sunday afternoon, and was not connected with any church-service. Many boys who did not belong to the school were in the adjoining reading-room during its session. The younger children had a room to themselves, and their exercises had some Kindergarten features; the children often marched as they sang, in the room itself and outside in the passages. The teaching was chiefly that of hymns and texts, though there was opportunity for whatever doctrine or reproof the teacher wished to bestow.

One Sunday, as the school was dismissed, Robertson came to meet her. It was his first visit to the school since she had joined it.

"Miss Brigham tells me," he said, "that you now come here regularly. This is very unexpected help."

"If it is help at all," said Lilla, standing on the doorstep.

"May I walk home with you? I suppose," he continued as they turned down the street, "you cannot have a doubt of that."

"The question is, what I am to teach those infants?"

"Is it in point to say that a large amount of teaching lies in the fact that so wonderful a being is kind to them all? When I was a little fellow at Sunday-school, I was wholly enslaved by a fair saint who used to appear among us wrapped in celestial hues and odors. It was not her beauty alone that we felt, — if, indeed, she was beautiful; it was her care of us, her goodness to us. I know that I personally associated her with the early Christian martyrs, and had n't the least doubt in the world that after teaching a certain number of years in the Sunday-school, she would be put to death in some such glorious way. All this sweetness which a woman sometimes wears is food and drink to children, as in fact to every one; but what made it of lasting good to us was undoubtedly the sense of consecration which shone through it. Now," concluded Robertson, fearing he might have discouraged her with these fanciful memories, "you may trust to the

children for the idealization, if you will give the sincerity."

"So far," said Lilla, "I have told no falsehoods. That 's about all I can say for myself. I do have an interest in the strange little things, and I know God is very good to us all, or would be if we would let him. I have committed myself to that."

Arnold smiled.

"Don't commit yourself any faster than your convictions warrant."

"Are you not more troubled with sincerity than its opposite?" asked Lilla; "with teachers who believe very bad things and teach them most sincerely?"

"No," said Robertson hesitatingly. "We are troubled much with unconscious *insincerity;* teachers expecting to influence their classes with motives they consider correct, but which do not influence themselves. No, if they are living the upward life and will urge on their scholars the beliefs and reasons that really govern them, I will let pass much that I consider false. Christ when on earth allowed many to speak in his name who knew little of him, and still he unites under his leadership men of all stages of development and intellectual grasp. We are not a school of philosophers keen to denounce false theories, we are a company of travelers on the same road, and may well be patient with each other."

"That idea is not consistent with the idea of the church, is it?"

"Is n't it? It seems to me consistent with the true idea of the church. Those that profess Christ

are the guardians of a great treasure; they may forget that their discipleship should make them judges and lovers of goodness wherever found. Even now, outside of the visible church, the world often seems to me rushing violently towards perfection. How will the church look on it, — this abundant harvest from seed blown beyond its pale? And how, if it forgets its primal allegiance to goodness, will the men and women of the future tame this masterful institution, so that it shall not repeat in our own country its crimes against the gentleness of Christ?"

When they reached Mrs. Miller's, they entered the small, chilly reception-room, and Lilla threw open the windows, letting in the mild air of the late summer afternoon.

"There," she said, "the low window is the one good feature of this room. If you will sit in it and rest yourself, I will bring some lemons and make you some lemonade."

When Lilla reappeared, she was in the simplest of summer dresses, and, spreading a towel on the table, she set vigorously to work squeezing lemons. Arnold sat on the low window-sill and looked alternately at her and into the street. Her sleeves were pulled up, showing her strong wrists; her whole figure was instinct with the strength rather than the delicacy of womanhood. As he watched her, for the moment he forgot the century in which he was living, and imagined her a Teutonic maiden, half-goddess, strong to love and to fight. But this picture was followed by one more moving, as he remembered the strong, lithe woman's shape bent tenderly over

a crying child, which sight in the midst of so much human imperfection and meanness had, even before he recognized her, sent a thrill of delight to his heart. The child somehow gave the last divine touch.

From some question of Robertson's as to where her childhood was spent, Lilla had been recalling her mother's family.

"The Hastings have been in southern Connecticut for several generations; fond of good cooking, good receipts, and comfortable housekeeping, as Connecticut River households often are. My father was from western New York. He was far cleverer, and was dark and tall."

"Mrs. Meredith told me," said Robertson, "that your mother died when you were ten years old and your father when you were eighteen."

Miss Wilton assented with an inscrutable look at him. His memory was curiously exact.

"I have now discovered a second cousin," she continued, "in Mrs. Miller, who keeps this boarding-house."

She went on to repeat a part of Mrs. Miller's revelation to her, to her hearer's apparent satisfaction.

"Then shall you stay here for a time?"

"Very probably."

"I suppose your fellow-boarders are hardly amusing."

"On the contrary, they are half amusing and half pathetic. Their lives are very sober and simple, and seem more real than my own. Their occupations are absolutely predetermined, or at least they think they are. The Thomsons, for instance,

would never admit that they did anything because they wished to; it is always from necessity, or a sense of duty, or because 'no choice is left to them.' It is certainly a comforting delusion, and gives their daily round all the dignity of the inalterable. Then these people are blessed with reverence for all the old-fashioned ideals. A learned man they think knows something worth knowing; a rich man is one whom God has blessed with princely power; and everybody is strictly accountable to some one, though not to them. Really, the Thomsons grow upon one, as one lives with them. Some new people are here now, young and very smart; but they find us so stupid that they will probably leave. Then the Miller girls, and my dear Mr. Willcox, and that wretch, Jennings, whose bad manners are overbalanced by his unusually spotless morals! I may get over it, Mr. Robertson, but at present I am enjoying myself immensely."

"You are fortunate," said Robertson, "and I hope you won't get over it. I fear I have n't so much imagination, or else this lifeless weather has dried me up. Life flows rather thin for me at times."

"You are so much with the wretchedly poor. It 's no wonder you should feel so."

"Oh, it 's not that. When I have these attacks, every building and street, however expensive, is sordid; every work of man, tawdry beyond description. Nothing less than the unstained country, or a flower or blade of grass, is free from the taint."

Lilla made no answer. She recalled Mrs. Mere-

dith's regret that a man who had such an unusual love of the country should take up interests exclusively in the city. Lilla herself cared little for the country. Also, she felt the heat much less than he did.

On the following Wednesday they met again. Lilla had come downstairs with hat and parasol, and had found on the hall-table an invitation from the Taylors to visit them at the seashore in New Jersey. It was the first sign she had had that her friends had not forgotten her existence, for even Mrs. Meredith had not written since their parting. A vision of the salt sea and the long beaches passed through her mind; then she returned to her room to write the answer. It was that she was much pleased not to be forgotten, but that she could not leave town for the present. With this note to post, she again went downstairs.

She had gone but a few steps on the street when she heard Robertson's voice and turned.

"I am fortunate in catching you," he said. "I am off to-day on a river expedition, and wondered if you could go with me. It 's business still. I am going on a city boat to Blackwell's Island and other points. It 's an official trip and a nice boat, and I suppose it will be cool on the river. We should not be home till dark."

Lilla's face brightened.

"I am glad to go. Let me leave word for Mrs. Miller and get a wrap."

They walked back to the door, Lilla wondering how he had met her so neatly and not daring to ask,

for by a certain timid air about him she thought he had been watching for her, at least for a few minutes.

"Let me mail your letter," said Arnold, and at the next box he unconsciously set the seal to her resignation of summer pleasures.

When Lilla was again in her room that evening, after a late and solitary dinner, she sent Elsa away; then, locking her door, she walked to the mantelpiece, and stood there with her face buried in her arms.

The day had been one of much interest, with the help of Mr. Robertson's really detailed knowledge of the people and institutions which came under their notice. He had been interested and observant, very different from the overworked man he had seemed the other evening. She had never before seen him in official relations with other men, and was struck by his clear sense and promptness of thought, and the cordiality akin to friendship shown on both sides in many of his interviews with superintendents, physicians, or inspectors. How many-sided a man's life was! What freemasonry existed between those of widely different education and circumstances! And how childish for a woman always to imagine the one interpretation when a man sought her society! Mr. Robertson had a few months before broken deliberately away from her acquaintance. Now he sought it again, apparently without the least inward conflict. Because sure of himself, this was too plain to be doubted. They were both in unconventional surroundings, and he offered her a frank fellowship, but that was all.

Lilla, strangely enough, was very glad of this. She knew much better than did he how unlike they were; she knew how far he was from understanding her narrow thoughts and selfish principles of action, she knew that his path of happiness must lie apart from hers, and yet she knew, too, that she would never act on this knowledge. She had come to the strange conviction that with all her self-assertion she at bottom lacked self-respect. She might say good words, she might even do good acts, but not from her own inward necessity. Must it always be so? Could she not come to have a sincere, pure life of her own, springing from her own heart, be a reality and not an imitation and mockery? She did not know, but she felt sure, — sure and very glad, that till she had changed, Arnold would never pretend that he loved her.

Miss Wilton learned that he had in mind a trip to the Adirondacks to give his brother Philip a taste of camping-out. They were walking together late one afternoon, as she had an errand on hand, and Robertson, being in unusual spirits, had been sighing for a horse and proposing to give her a riding-lesson in the park that very evening. Lilla laughed at his nonsense, and asked whether he intended to spend the whole summer in the city. Then he told her of this plan, which was for September.

"I am glad of that," she said with satisfaction in her voice.

"Why don't *you* do something?" asked Robertson. "I don't think you take proper care of yourself."

"I like the city and like heat. Besides, I 'm

economizing. What did you suppose I lived at Mrs. Miller's for? I have saved enough now for a tea-service; in fact, I am on my way to buy it."

"Think," said Arnold, "of the acres of fresh grass somewhere, the flowers, the great oaks and elms, each a world of leaves and song, the distant soft clouds, and the brooks flowing contentedly through the woods."

"Don't come visiting the poorer classes with talk of that sort," returned Lilla. "That is not the way to instill content. You should dwell on the joys of economy and cleanliness, and the rapture of not being out of work and being able to make both ends meet. Can't you get up an essay on the compensations of city life?"

"I might try," said Robertson significantly.

By this time they had reached the china and crockery store, and Lilla asked to see inexpensive tea-services. It was astonishing what pretty things were brought out for insignificant prices. "Are n't they cheap?" said Lilla, having made her choice.

"Very," said Robertson, wiping his fingers on his handkerchief, "dirt cheap."

"Of course they 're dirty. How soon can you send them?" she inquired of the salesman. "Not till to-morrow?"

"Let me carry them," said Robertson. "You 'll want them at once, I 'm sure."

As they came out with the large package, they found themselves in the midst of a set of young loafers, who were at the moment exchanging such a volley of imprecations that Lilla started.

"I am sorry you heard that," said Robertson, suddenly grave.

"Sometimes I think," said Lilla, after a pause, "that our objection to swearing is chiefly a matter of taste. Do you think God resents a man's abuse?"

"No, of course not. As a rule, however, swearing is a trustworthy symptom of disease."

"These poor things! What can one expect?"

"One can expect everything. A man's sin is his own fault."

"That 's a hard doctrine. Some people have so little chance."

"I should n't dare to look the poor rascals in the face, if I did n't believe it. It 's the life-blood of my happiness to believe that righteousness and peace are within every one's reach. Our message must be 'You ought and you can.' I suppose I seem hard. If I am not right, life is hard beyond endurance. I don't mean that we can expect the same conception of duty from every man, but loyalty to his own sense of duty we can expect. Just now I am having a proof in the life of a poor woman struggling against overwhelming odds and deserted by every one, of this power of moral resurrection. Goodness is n't logical. It is a sort of celestial insanity."

They were silent for some moments, then Lilla said with a sigh, —

"Miss Brigham tells me such dreadful tales, and all in a matter-of-fact, direct way. I can't deny them; at the same time I feel sure that if I saw these

various instances of misery, I should see alleviating circumstances also, or at all events, reasons for the misery which would console one a little. Miss Brigham simply drops misfortunes on my head like so many brickbats."

"She is certainly a very straightforward person," said Arnold. "An hour with her clips the wings of one's imagination pretty thoroughly. It sometimes takes me two or three days to recover from her."

"Is it good for the children to be in the hands of such a matter-of-fact, unimaginative woman?"

"I have thought of that. What is your feeling? You have worked with her."

Lilla hesitated.

"They are rough children, of course, and she does hold them in hand wonderfully well, and knows them all at home too. I think they need her and some one else also."

"They have some one else, now."

"I am not the right one; at all events, not yet. And you know I tell them a great many things that were never in the Bible. Perhaps you would not think my mixture sufficiently strong with Scripture."

"You are still able to believe what you do say to them, are you not?"

"So far," said Lilla, not looking at him.

"I know they are fond of you."

Lilla said nothing till, as they reached Mrs. Miller's doorsteps, the thought of his holiday recurred to her.

"I am so glad you are going to the mountains. The very thought of it does me good. I wish Sep-

tember were not so far off. Your summer in the city will make you enjoy it the more."

"Perhaps not," said Arnold.

"Oh, but it will."

His eyes met hers, and there was in them something boyish and wistful, as if he could not understand any better than she the unseen forces that ordered their lives and silenced his tongue. Her eyes filled with tears, and she left him hastily.

"Ah, don't," she cried within herself. "The road is too steep and strange for a woman like me. I cannot really be good till I believe in myself, and I don't believe in myself, — not yet."

CHAPTER XIII.

WILLCOX had been forced to fulfill the engagement he had made with Miss Folsom. It was with strange unwillingness that he went up the two flights to Miss Granger's floor. After the plain words which Miss Folsom had used before going to Newport, Willcox had very honestly set to work to rid himself of all the foolish fancies that had suddenly run away with him. He had succeeded tolerably well, though it had hurt him more than he would have thought to hear again, directly from her lips, how ridiculous even his slight degree of hopefulness had seemed to her. Now she probably thought herself too cruel, and was trying to be kind, and he must accept the kindness as gratefully as he might.

Tom Folsom was already there as when Willcox arrived, and after the two ladies had given the newcomer a cordial reception, the brother and sister returned to their sofa and their chat, while Miss Granger exchanged bits of news with Willcox.

When they went in to tea, Willcox noted gravely, though in a covert way, how wonderfully perfect Miss Folsom was that evening, neat in figure and finished in dress. She usually wore soft colors, and her blue eyes and determined face were so familiar to him that they seemed like reminiscences from childish years. He could take no pleasure now in

these sights. He felt with an inward shudder that he was of a coarser mould. He loathed himself, his unmanageable clothes, his uneducated manners. He spent some time watching her brother. Tom was by no means his ideal gentleman, for he was a little reckless in both speech and movement. Even in the essentials of sentiment and opinion, Willcox feared that he was by no means worthy of his sister. Yet with all his carelessness, there was a certain refinement about him which put to the blush his own cautious self-suppression.

After tea, the table was cleared with wonderful swiftness, and the men were left in the supper-room to do their business. Tom Folsom threw himself into it with grim earnestness. He had thoroughly committed himself to this new occupation, and was determined to succeed. He had a certain talent which Willcox recognized with wonder as being wholly different from his own, and where his information was at fault, he knew how to learn from others with the greatest docility. He was in a hurry to finish, too, for he said he expected a fellow to call for him a little later.

When they at last reëntered the sitting-room, Miss Folsom was working by the table with a kitten in her lap. Miss Granger had disappeared. Tom took possession of the sofa, and Willcox drew up an armchair. The latter now became a little more talkative, and, with respectful glances at Bessie, aired several of his cherished opinions. When Tom's friend was announced as waiting below, Bessie bade her brother good-bye without rising. Will-

cox, becoming embarrassed, said something about its really being very late.

"You would n't disturb the kitten, I am sure," said Miss Folsom placidly; "I shall have to get up when you go."

Nothing could exceed the composure with which she uttered this absurd argument, and, as Willcox found nothing to say, he sat down. Hardly had he done so, however, when Tom was heard calling from the next room, and Bessie tossed the kitten down most unceremoniously to attend her brother's pleasure.

"Why, Tom, I almost thought you were hurt. What is the matter?" she asked.

"Nothing; I thought my stick had been stolen, but I see you put it in the closet. What a bump of order you have, Bessie! I say," he added in a lower voice, "are you going to finish that poor fellow to-night, or worry him a little and save him for another time?"

"What do you mean, Tom?" said Bessie, growing red.

"I can't make out what you want of him, that is all. He can just crawl off as it is, if you will keep your little paws off of him. Now don't get cross, and give your brother a sweet kiss. You have my blessing either way."

Bessie returned very soberly to her chair. It was several minutes before she could get Tom's words out of her head. She patted her work as it lay on her lap, and shifted her little feet about on the floor, while she asked Willcox all sorts of desultory questions. Then, happening to look up, and catching his

eyes fixed on her in a forlorn and distrustful manner, she forgot her brother, who indeed was well out of the way, and thoroughly bubbled over with fun and naughtiness. She told him any number of things, reminiscences of Newport, sayings of her Uncle Fuller, and opinions of her own manufactured on the spot, all with the softest inflections of her very winning voice. She was confiding and beseeching, and lured him into solemn statements of his views on important subjects, and then for no very plain reason her laugh would ring out in the most musical and irresistible way.

Willcox laughed, himself, again and again from the simple contagion of her fun, and watched her as he would have done a play, if he had ever gone to see one.

Then she dropped into a rigorous criticism of manners that almost took his breath away.

"No gentleman, — I mean," she said in a tone of careful explanation, "no *real* gentleman, Mr. Willcox, would ever cross his knees while calling on a lady. It is done constantly, I know, but it is n't right. It always shows a lack of training. How much better it looks to sit as you are doing now! It seems then as if a man might possibly rise, if anything were needed. The other position does very well for a smoking-room. Don't you agree with me?"

"Yes, entirely," said Willcox, gazing with wonder at his correct attitude.

"In fact, you look so very serviceable that I shall ask you to get my case of scissors from the corner cupboard. Would it trouble you?"

Willcox went obediently.

"The second drawer from the top, back side, left hand corner, just in front of the paper of pins. Thank you," she continued, as he came back. "Do you mind holding it a moment? I have just about finished."

"How wonderfully fast you sew!" exclaimed Willcox, watching her.

Miss Folsom laughed as she took the case of scissors from him with a nod of thanks. She bent her head more closely over her work to hide her face from him as he stood there. But Willcox very prosaically wandered back to his chair.

"You sew so evenly, too. Oh!" he added, bringing back his leg from its too natural position across the other one.

"It 's a matter of habit," returned Bessie, scarcely lifting her eyes.

After this there was silence for a short time. Willcox rose and leaned against the mantelpiece, so forgetful for the moment as to put his hands in his pockets. When he spoke at last, he smiled as if in contemptuous amusement at his own thoughts.

"What fools we mortals be!"

"Why?" asked Bessie, in most innocent surprise.

"We have about as much power to learn by experience as an ordinarily-gifted moth."

"What do you mean?"

Willcox looked for the moment as if he were meditating an escape from the room; then he began to talk instead, looking anywhere but at his little hostess.

"As I am a sober man, Miss Folsom, and advanced in years, perhaps you will let me tell you of something that amuses me, though the subject is not a usual one."

"I think we are old enough to talk frankly," said Bessie, nodding gravely at him.

"A man wanders along the wilderness of this life with tolerable content, until he suddenly sees something very different from the things he has been liking and disliking. There may be a world of these beings somewhere, perhaps there must be to make one possible, but he has never seen but this one. Naturally he enjoys the sight. It runs away with his imagination. He delights to find perfection continually. He could not bear that she should be deficient in any way, or that she should care for anything but the best things, — with one fatal exception," pursued Willcox after a pause. "He chooses out of the world, just because it happens to be himself, a very ill-deserving man, unfit every way, and makes it the final test of her divinity that she should see something good in him. Is n't it absurd?" continued Willcox, interrupting with a laugh the over-serious tone which had overtaken him. "Why can't a man forget his vile self at such moments? The reasonable way, of course, would be for him to select some hero suitable for her, and say to her, 'I love you desperately. If you have any pity for me, give a smile to my friend Smith.' Well, these, as I was saying, Miss Folsom, are the reflections of an old bachelor, and if you will allow me I will look at my watch. I am afraid I have an engagement elsewhere."

Bessie made not the slightest reply to this very sudden announcement, and he went into the next room. As he had left his hat on her piano, the move gave her much amusement. She ran across the room and came back towards the mantelpiece, hiding it behind her.

"You will find the cake in the sideboard, Mr. Willcox," she called in the softest of tones.

This brought him to the door, wearing a rather sheepish expression.

"I can't remember where I put my hat; I am terribly forgetful."

"How unlike your friend Smith!" said Bessie with a chuckle.

Willcox looked towards the piano and around the room. Then his face suddenly showed that he had caught a glimpse of it.

Miss Folsom brought it out from behind her with a delicious little laugh.

"Now you must beg for it. Say 'Please.'"

"Why should I? I don't want it," said Willcox, radiant with pleasure.

"That is naughty. What would the hero Smith do under the circumstances?"

"I don't care for Smith."

"To be honest, I don't either," said Bessie, holding out the hat with frank courtesy.

Willcox delayed to take it.

"I will beg for it, if you like," he said, wholly under the spell of that charming picture.

"Ah," said Miss Folsom in a tone of light reproof which he could not but obey. "You must go now."

It was strange how pleasantly that first monosyllable sounded in his ears long after he had left her. It recognized in its touch of suddenness the homage that might have escaped him, and yet it carried with it all the fearlessness of an assured despotism. Her voice had a wonderful significance.

This evening supplied Willcox with much material for thought. Nothing very definite had happened, and yet his ideas had been completely turned about. However little might be meant by it, Miss Folsom was certainly good to him again, and the more he reflected on the details of what had happened, the more encouragement did he draw from them. And yet with this sudden rekindling of hope came the spirit of seriousness. All the value of his life was at stake, if his wild hopes had indeed any foundation. Where is the devoted lover who cannot easily pass from wonder that he is considered worthy, to questionings as to whether she may be. Whenever the object of his love is no mere ideal, but, on the happiest supposition, an honest human being by his side, this double question must exist.

Though these thoughts could hardly have more than one result in the case of Willcox, they kept him for some time in quiet self-consultation. All of the next day and night, an extent of time so protracted that the earth seemed to have paused in weariness in its daily task of revolution, he held his secret thoughts to their task. The third day was Sunday. He was very glad of the fact, and went to church with a longing to test there the value of his new hopes. The opening prayer and hymn

had nothing he could take hold of. He struggled with himself. It must be his own fault that they seemed to have so little meaning. Then came the reading of Scripture. It was from St. Paul. This certainly had meaning, though it was of little help to him. Paul's mind was concentrated on a race and a mark which for the moment were not plain to him. To be sure, Paul added, "If in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you." Still Willcox was not accustomed to think of himself as one of the otherwise-minded. The sermon was on the duty of personal entreaty with the unconverted, and Willcox let it pass altogether, and gave himself to examination of his own conscience and settlement of his own opinions. In this way he gradually worked his thoughts out and took his usual comfort in the closing exercises. He went home thoroughly happy, and determined to get at least a sight of Miss Folsom that afternoon.

And now it struck him forcibly that he had built many thoughts on a very slender foundation. He laughed cynically as he came down from his room past the children's nursery. He heard Maggie teaching her little brothers something that did not sound like the Bible. He stopped, and heard these ominous words: —

> "Took ill on Thursday,
> Worse on Friday;
> Died on Saturday,
> Buried on Sunday;

And this," added Maggie triumphantly, "is the end of Solomon Grundy."

They were absurd words to keep time to as he walked the streets. His right leg seemed to appropriate the days of the week, while his left supplied all the events of Solomon's checkered life, for Willcox was sufficiently well educated to recall his earlier adventures.

"Buried on Sunday," he repeated, as he drew near Miss Granger's house. "Very well, it 's as good a day as there is, if that must be the end of Solomon Grundy."

He did not have time to ring before the door was opened by Miss Granger herself, who was starting for the afternoon service. Bessie, she said, was out. She had some hope of meeting her at church, though it was not her custom to go there. Willcox was so much pleased at hearing this little name familiarly treated with him that he not only did not criticise its use as a point of etiquette, but felt unusually attracted by this gaunt maiden lady. He was pleased, too, with the idea of seeing Bessie at church, and in the glow of the moment offered his escort to Miss Granger. He saw immediately that he had blundered. Miss Granger assented, indeed, but with a degree of consternation that was not encouraging. Not knowing how far away the church might be, and how great the strain on his social tact, Willcox managed to extricate himself, though but awkwardly, from his own snare, and then followed at a distance. He satisfied himself that Miss Folsom was not at church, and with a keen enjoyment of his occupation which did not seem warranted by its ill-success, trudged back again and rang the bell at Miss Gran-

ger's. Miss Folsom being again reported as out, he came down to the street with a good-humored smile at the petty subterfuges of fortune. What a plaything fortune must always be in the hands of a man!

The shadows were lengthening that afternoon when Miss Folsom came up the street from the series of calls which Sunday always suggested to her. On that quiet thoroughfare the passers were few, and she had forgotten her surroundings in picturing the country delights of her uncle's little place where she hoped soon to visit, when she was confronted by the familiar figure of Willcox. His uncovered, sandy-haired head suggested to her thoughts immediately another country scene, but his eyes had a different look from the submission and content they had expressed that day on the Walpole hills.

The meeting was almost a silent one, and then together they passed Bessie's home and turned up the next avenue.

Miss Granger was already home from church when they started on this walk; the tea had been waiting five minutes when they were back again at the door.

That Miss Folsom had somehow kept him at bay the whole time was evident. As she was speaking her farewell words, he leaned on the railing, watching her with his whole heart and soul, but apparently resigned to speechlessness.

"I don't know that you will understand me," she was saying as she stood on the lowest step, her serious eyes fixed on him, though her little hand in its long glove trembled slightly as she raised and let

drop her closed parasol, "but I cannot measure men as you do just in accordance with their religious profession. Something in me rebels when a man mentions his religion; whether he does it familiarly as he goes along, as if it were an accepted fact with both of us, or whether he drags it in at the end, as if his spiritual nature had just occurred to him. I don't believe in it, I cannot, Mr. Willcox, even to make you think well of me. If you showed me a man you thought perfect, whose religion taught him self-control, self-devotion, compassion, I could not call him perfect till he should do these same things without the consciousness of his religion. The religious man blinds himself to the goodness without theory or self-interest which is the best thing I know of. You know, Mr. Willcox, that I am not speaking of you, but only of the ideal which you hold up to yourself. My ideal is the manhood of the old days, when men thought themselves the offspring of gods in a practical way they no longer use. You know Morris gives their motto, or perhaps you may not have read Morris: —

> 'Love thou the Gods — and *withstand* them,
> Lest thy fame should fail in the end,
> And thou be but their thrall and their bondsman,
> Who wert born for their very friend.'

'Withstand them,' — that is, of course, when they conflict with your own nature."

Miss Folsom had wrought herself up to enthusiasm, and gave her quotation with a ring of defiance in her voice.

Willcox answered without any hesitation.

"I have no doubt that you are right. It takes great originality to be a true Christian. I am so much accustomed to certain set phrases that I may often suggest theories which I would not stand to. I think, however, that I take things a good deal into my own hands when I say, as I do fearlessly, that no difference of religious doctrine should stand in the way of a man's love, when it springs from his best self. The love has the right to mould his belief, for *it* is the likest God."

Willcox stated quietly and gravely this solution of the problem that had been troubling him, and seeing that Miss Folsom was turning away to leave him, he added in another tone: —

"I hope I have n't tired you with either the walk or the talk. I am afraid I surprised you into both. When will you let me see you again?"

Bessie raised her sober blue eyes, but carefully shunned meeting his look.

"Not for a long time I fear, Mr. Willcox. You know I told you I was going to my uncle's."

"What day do you mean to go?"

"Oh, very soon;" this was said with great carelessness. "I shall be back in September, you know."

"At what hour to-morrow can I see you?"

"To-morrow! You can't see me to-morrow at all."

Willcox stopped, discomfited.

Miss Folsom went slowly up the steps, and then began feeling in her pocket for her key.

"Would Tuesday be any better?" asked poor

Willcox, contriving to swallow his disappointment at the delay.

"Not a bit better."

"Then I will call to-night."

"Excuse me, but you will do nothing of the kind."

"Ah, Miss Folsom," cried Willcox, taking a step upwards, "what can you mean? You cannot know how frightfully cruel it sounds. What do you risk in letting me call to-morrow?"

"What do I risk?" repeated Bessie with a queer look. "Now don't put on such a dreadful expression. I risk missing you altogether. I have promised to spend to-morrow night in Brooklyn."

"Ah," sighed Willcox, relieved, yet looking at her not wholly forgivingly. "Then there is Tuesday night."

Miss Folsom, having pulled off her glove, had contrived to find her key. She answered very softly: —

"Tuesday we have company. You are worse than the Spanish Inquisition."

"Then I *will* see you on Wednesday. What am I to live on till Wednesday?"

Bessie made a charming gesture of derision, by which movement her glove, unfortunately, dropped from her grasp. Was it an answer to his question?

Like a flash Willcox had the little warm glove and was down the steps with it. As he turned guiltily to hear her remonstrances, he found that she was gone, and the door was shut.

The next three days seemed frightfully long to poor Willcox. On Tuesday evening, as he came into the house, Miss Wilton was looking over her

letters by the door. Her face was troubled, and at another time he would have stopped to speak with her, but his heart and head were too full just then for him to wish her confidences, and he quickly passed her.

Lilla's letters were not all bills, fortunately. One was signed T. J. Gardiner. She was surprised, and took it up to her room. It ran as follows: —

MY DEAR MISS WILTON, — Perhaps I should not flatter myself that, among your many interests, you will remember the man who, daring to differ with you as to the fate of a rose, drew on himself a self-decreed exile. I have learned, however, of your seclusion in a boarding-house, which during this midsummer weather you must find hot as well as quiet; and I have returned to town, curtailing an already short vacation.

When I left your drawing-room under the severe provocation just mentioned, I felt sure that I could easily forget you. I was right. My business called for all my energy, and I gave it. If you now could see my friends, you would hear of me as an already successful man. I have always known since boyhood that my virtues were those that would be far more becoming in a rich than in a poor man. I know that the woman I should love would be a woman to whom money would be practically a necessity. I was driven by all that was good in me to a life of hard money-making, and I am succeeding beyond my hopes. The world is turning its sunny side to me at last.

You see, I am very honest with you. I admit that I forgot you. Very few women in this world will hear from men the sober truth about such matters. You I hold to be an exception, and if you were not, I should have to change, not my manner of commending myself, but the object to whom I commended myself.

You may, therefore, be led to believe me when I say that I have an intense desire to renew the acquaintance so suddenly dropped. I acknowledge myself an impertinent fool to have insisted on receiving a mark of favor you did not care to give. Do you require any further confession of ill-desert? You will find me ready.

I shall do myself the honor of calling within a few days, and if any particular hour or day will favor my chance of seeing you, perhaps you will have the kindness to send me word.

Very faithfully yours,

T. J. GARDINER.

To this letter Miss Wilton wrote the following answer: —

MY DEAR MR. GARDINER, — I did value my acquaintance with you, and at the time was grieved by its sudden close. I think I see now, however, that our absurd dispute was not a chance difference of mood, but a fixed difference of temper, and that a renewed acquaintance would but insure a renewed disagreement. I prefer to avoid this. I am indeed living economically this summer. It is a matter of

necessity. This alone would make it inconvenient to receive you.

I congratulate you on your success, and hope it will continue to leave room for kind thoughts of your old friends.

Yours very truly,

LILLA H. WILTON.

As, on the following morning, Miss Wilton folded this for the mail, she was by no means in a cheerful mood. It was not inspiriting to discover how money matters were closing in upon her, and that she must find some new friend to borrow from.

"It would be disgraceful to trouble Mrs. Meredith a third time," she said to herself. "I must have another talk with Mr. Willcox."

When she went in to dinner that night, Willcox had not yet arrived. He came late, and had not finished as Miss Wilton rose with the others, but he cast longing glances after her as she passed into the sitting-room, and he soon pushed away his plate and followed her.

"Miss Wilton," he said, standing directly before her with a face of rapture, "I am engaged to be married."

"Oh, Mr. Willcox, really!"

It seemed a farce to inquire to whom, but she did it.

"To Miss Folsom;" and his eyes added, "Just think of that."

"I am so glad. Miss Folsom! I feel as if I knew her well. I wish you every happiness."

"Every one knows it now but the Thomsons. I think they must be in soon. I hear them now."

He darted off to tell them, and, when later she heard him go out, she reflected that she had forgotten to speak of her own affairs. It would have been cruel to do so at that moment.

Bessie Folsom was to have left for her uncle's, and Miss Granger for Walpole, on some day of this week. These movements had been delayed a few days on account of the engagement. Willcox could hardly believe himself of such importance, but preserved on this subject a dignified silence.

One evening Bessie was telling him about her relatives at Southfield. She was sitting opposite him in a small armchair, as demure and self-respecting as a kitten.

"You know, Mr. Willcox," — she began.

"I beg your pardon. I don't know him."

"Oh, well, you know anyhow that my aunt" —

"Now look here," said Willcox firmly. "This will not do at all. My name belongs in there somewhere. This is dreadful. I shall insist soon on having a certificate of our engagement to show to the girl at the door. Now begin again."

"I can't say it," said Bessie resolutely. "I won't."

"Ah," said Willcox, rising.

"Oh, Jim, Jim, Jim, Jim, Jim. Do sit down again. You must n't frighten me."

"It was not exactly a tender way of pronouncing my name. Still, go ahead."

"It is very wrong of you to stop me so. I was

going to say something to please you. My aunt will want you to be down at Southfields all you can. So you can see me the first Sunday."

Willcox laughed disdainfully.

"I should think so. Whom did you suppose I should go to see the first Sunday?"

"Why, but supposing my aunt had n't room for you?"

"If necessary, I would sleep in a hay-mow and dine at the town-pump."

"Then I am sure you would not be fit to be seen; I would not own you."

"What difference does that make, as long as I own you?"

"You will appreciate the difference, sir, if the time ever comes."

Just then Bessie heard Miss Granger outside, and she went quickly after her.

"I want you to come in, Hattie," she said. "Don't always run away. Jim will get a chair for you."

It struck Willcox as very strange that he could be so happy in any situation in which Bessie chose to place him. One would have supposed that an interruption like this would be a matter for simple endurance. On the contrary, when once in her presence, within range of the curious little glances from her blue eyes (they were not wholly blue nor wholly gray eyes), he could imagine nothing happier than to sit forever just as he was. It was so sweet to watch all her good ways with other people, to hear the reflections and expressions that he by himself

had not the art to draw from her, and best of all to feel that she knew her despotic power over him, so that every indifferent remark to Miss Granger given in the soft music of her voice was a covert assertion of the subjection in which she held him. That undertone of significance in word and act was a wonderful charm in Miss Folsom. She was not one of those foolish, fluttering women who have no understanding of a situation. Ah, she was a clever little woman. She knew the value of her appeal, when her eyes were occasionally raised to his. Then she did everything well. She knew all the mysteries of delicate sewing. It had not escaped Willcox's observation that to her was due the order and cleanliness of this pretty home. She knew about medicines too. He had heard her tell Mrs. Miller a great deal more than he ever knew about prescriptions and nursing. If a woman has real cleverness, she can turn it to any use. There was her music. How well she had taught herself and others, in spite of her limited opportunities! Then, too, what a wonderful atmosphere of good breeding there was about her! It was indeed miraculous that such a treasure should have been left for him to appropriate.

"Only," said Willcox indignantly to himself, "men are such brutes and idiots, they could not understand or deserve her, and I — ah, I could not either, if she had not made me equal to any fate by coming to live in my heart."

"You are not paying attention to me," interrupted Miss Folsom severely.

"I beg your pardon, I am paying a great deal of

attention to you, though not much, perhaps, to what you are saying."

"We were talking of breaking up our housekeeping here on Monday;" and Bessie went on expounding to him the necessities of the situation, and trying to make him admit that he might possibly keep himself alive from Monday to Saturday without seeing her. During this dialogue Miss Granger succeeded in her third attempt to get out of the room and upstairs.

As Willcox, some minutes later, was taking his leave, he said with a sigh:—

"There are so many beautiful things to be said, and we say so little. I suppose we shall have all our lives, though, to say them in."

"We must have more time to-morrow," said Bessie. "I was afraid you might not be pleased to-night, but Hattie has been feeling very badly, and I wanted her to know you better, and so I made her stay. To-morrow we will see if we can suffice unto ourselves."

She watched him from the entry, as he went slowly downstairs. Miss Granger, hearing his step, came out from her room above.

"I wonder how Mrs. Thomson's neuralgia is now," she said. "We might have asked Mr. Willcox. Oh, don't call him. It is n't important. Ah, why did you do it? I am afraid he won't like it."

Willcox came up the stairs as if he did like it.

"Miss Granger has something to ask you," said Bessie with a careless gesture, whereupon her friend in some confusion put her question.

As the two returned into their sitting-room, Miss Granger remonstrated again.

"You should n't have done that, Bessie. Men don't really like to be treated so. Of course, he 's good now, but stairs are stairs for anybody, and you must economize a little on his devotion, you know."

"Hoh," said Bessie scornfully, "I 'll make him come up again, if you like."

"I don't like. You must n't, really, Bessie. You don't know much about men. You can't really count on them. They are very queer and changeable."

"Perfect nonsense!" exclaimed Bessie hotly. "He would go up and down on his knees, if I cared to have him."

"Yes, I suppose he would," said Miss Granger.

Something in her voice touched Bessie. She watched her friend as she went about the room, gathering up her sewing, which she had left about. Then she came to her and put her arm around her.

"Dear Hattie," she said, "I wish it were not so hard for you."

Miss Granger made no response to the caress. She almost seemed to shrink from it.

"Ah, Hattie," said her friend, much grieved. "You know I love you just as much."

"Wait a few days, Bessie," said Miss Granger piteously. "I shall be all right then. That is not much time to ask — for such a change. My little Bessie, my best of Bessies, I thought I had you for always. Ah, don't, dear; I knew that I could say nothing to please you to-night. If you will wait a

little, darling, it will be all right. I shall feel very differently soon. It will be nice for me too. Don't cry, little pet."

But it was too late to ask that, and the two cried together, till Miss Granger kissed Bessie's wet little cheeks over and over again, and left her silently.

The five days of separation proved to be even harder to bear than Willcox had feared. One heavenly alleviation was vouchsafed to him. Bessie's letters were a good reflection of herself. They were self-contained and sweet, yet had a certain downrightness in what they did admit, which sent the poor fellow into ecstasies of happiness. It was a good thing, really, to have a part of this wonderful experience committed to paper. As long as these little sheets lasted, they must prove a treasure-house of delight.

When Saturday came at last, Willcox was able to take the two o'clock train to Southfields. It was a warm day, but not really oppressive after one met the sea-breezes which the Shore Line could offer its passengers. The trees were in the height of their luxuriance. The lawns and meadows that rolled rapidly by on either side had become rather yellow from the three weeks' drought, but the occasional brooks bubbled fearlessly along under their leafy armor, as if they knew that the proud and merciless sun had really begun to retreat southwards.

Southfields had a large passenger station, because there was a junction there. The town itself was small and concentrated. Willcox passed through the depot, and seeing no sign of a private carriage,

was about to inquire the distance to Mr. Fuller's, when he caught sight of a small phaeton standing by a post at the other side of the very wide street, and in it was some one furiously waving a handkerchief.

Willcox picked up his valise and hurried across. It was indeed Bessie who sat holding the reins, clad in most delightful summer freshness, but singularly eclipsed by a gray tissue veil wound airily about her black plumed hat. Willcox put his valise in behind while Miss Folsom explained.

"I was afraid to come nearer, because the pony is n't accustomed to trains. My uncle told me to be very careful with him. I did n't even bring any whip, because he thought it was safer."

Willcox took an observation of the dangerous animal, who was now standing with deceptive meekness watching the train move off.

"I don't like to have you risk yourself with any vicious horse."

"He is n't vicious, only he feels gay sometimes."

"Am I to get in there?" asked Willcox.

"Yes, is n't there room enough?" said Bessie anxiously.

"Plenty of room," returned Willcox, suppressing an inclination to chuckle. "I only wanted to know."

"There, now," said Bessie, handing him his end of the duster, and chirruping to the meditative beast between the shafts. "Go along, pony, get up. Would you mind poking him with the end of my sunshade? It takes him a little while to start, but

you have no idea how fast he will go sometimes. Once more, please. Go 'long. Here we go."

They were going sure enough, and though Willcox dismissed any fears for Bessie's personal safety, the rate at which they traveled over the deeply shaded roads was as fast as any man in his situation could have wished.

"How good you were to come after me yourself!" he said, looking rather shyly at the charming accessories of Miss Folsom's summer toilet.

Bessie laughed merrily and drew her veil lower across her face.

"You see," she said after a pause, by way of explanation, "outsiders have a ridiculous way of supposing that I am secretly pining for you from morning till night. So there is no other part for me to play."

"What a naughty thing to say!" said Willcox contentedly. "However, as there never will be any other part for you to play, I am not going to make myself disagreeable." He was gathering courage a little by this time, and did not pretend to look elsewhere than at the bewitching little figure, so cleverly protected from the sun, the wind, and himself. He went on boldly.

"Is n't that a clever dodge for an unattractive fellow like myself? To find a woman who could not by any possibility be unwomanly, and then in the quiet clear harbor of her faithfulness to herself to rest on his oars in the most unbroken security?"

"Rather flowery, perhaps," said Bessie, "but as poetry we will let it pass." She was silent after

this rejoinder, and Willcox talked on, telling her when and where her letters had reached him, with other of those details which not only seem important facts to a newly accepted lover, but sometimes remain through a lifetime more significant memories than the crises of personal danger, the gain or loss of wealth, or any mere external change of fortune.

"Why do you find fault with your own looks?" said Miss Folsom softly, as he paused. "There is no use in affecting humility of that sort."

Willcox opened his eyes wide.

"I like that. May I ask what the correct opinion is?"

"Why, yes, I will tell you. It ought not to spoil you. You are not an Apollo, but you are very much of a man. You have a soldierly sort of figure. Your head is what I should call Olympian; a Teutonic Jove, however, with light hair and blue eyes. Evidently," she continued, with a most enticing laugh, "you have never had a woman to spoil you. I never thought to meet a man who needed instruction on his own good points."

Willcox gazed at her in dumb stupefaction, which seemed to cause her the greatest amusement. She laughed so merrily that she nearly lost the reins.

"Don't you think," said Willcox, "that for such a handsome fellow I was made to wait rather long?"

Bessie calmly ignored the question.

"At Newport, I used to see a wonderfully fine-looking man, thoroughly well-made in every way, except that his head was not especially handsome." She paused a moment, then went on mournfully.

"He loved another, and I never thought to see beauty in a man again."

"This is cruel, Bessie," said Willcox helplessly. "I am not the kind of ass you are feeling for. I can't believe in your compliments. Love me, if you can, because I love you with my whole self. I must see your eyes, darling. Is that veil a necessity? And now that we are in these beautiful woods, don't you think that" —

"No," said Bessie decidedly, "I noticed coming along that there is a house in there. But if you don't like my veil" —

It came off slowly, and Willcox murmured his satisfaction in very expressive language.

"It won't do for me to contradict you, as you do me," said Bessie very meekly. Then she pointed her sunshade at a narrow avenue leading off into the woods.

"There is a very pretty house in there, and," she added demurely, "it is the last one for half a mile."

Willcox laughed with delight.

"Then let me look into your eyes, and remember that for five days I have been starving."

Willcox was privately very much afraid of meeting Bessie's uncle, and had summoned all his self-confidence for the occasion. He soon found that this timidity was more called for with her aunt. Mr. Fuller was an old gentleman of mild and courteous manners. It was easy for Willcox to talk to him, and he was delighted to find in the long conversation which he had with him before the evening

dinner that he was really pleasing the old gentleman with his accurate knowledge on business topics.

Bessie had flown away somewhere, but before doing so had said to him apologetically: —

"You know, dear Jim, that Uncle will ask you solemnly about your ability to support me. It is perfectly absurd, but you won't mind."

"It is quite right that he should, my darling. Don't leave us long."

Mrs. Fuller was rather abrupt and unsympathetic. Willcox could not feel at all sure that he was pleasing her, though she did not fail in kindness and hospitality.

Miss Folsom reappeared before the dinner-hour, having put on a white muslin dress whose blue ribbons emphasized all that was blue in her changeable eyes. She showed Willcox the wide, vine-shaded piazza, which in the summer-time was the great charm of this quiet home, and then they went in to dinner.

It was so strange and new to see Bessie in her uncle's home, belonging to other people, and yet to be made so sure that she belonged to him, that even the dinner seemed fairy-like. Willcox simply accepted all the pleasures of the situation. Even if a dream, it should be enjoyed.

As they sat afterwards in the little sitting-room opening on the piazza, Mrs. Fuller led him into conversation. He did the best he could and did not do badly, but he said to himself that Mrs. Fuller was a clever woman like Bessie, and that he was not equal to more than one of that kind.

The moonlight grew stronger on the piazza outside. Willcox could see from where he sat the tall firs and spruces quietly moving their tops under its spell. Bessie was talking with her uncle, but at last rose, and, after standing a few moments silently in the doorway, stepped out into the night.

Willcox's eyes followed her wistfully, but he did not feel at liberty to stir. Minute after minute he perseveringly renewed his remarks to Mrs. Fuller, who watched him with something like contempt. At last she said dryly: —

"I am afraid it is damp outside. Will you take Bessie her shawl?"

Willcox took it obediently and went out.

"The idiot will be coming back again," said Mrs. Fuller, watching. But she was wrong. Willcox had found a little white figure strolling about in the moonlight, and he did not return.

Mr. and Mrs. Fuller discussed their future nephew with some difference of opinion.

"He is a good specimen of a man, I think," said Mr. Fuller. "Honest, pure-minded men don't grow on every bush."

"Oh, it will work well on the whole, I suppose," said his wife. "It is the way the world goes, the more 's the pity. Everywhere, women of some breeding and some idea of gentle manners are marrying much commoner men. Well, the men can support them, and that is certainly something to be taken into account, but at times I wonder where our gentlemen hide themselves."

CHAPTER XIV.

One day Mrs. Miller came downstairs as Lilla, having just come in, stood by the hall-table pulling off her gloves.

"Two men have been here to see you, Lilla," she said in a pitying tone. "They wished to wait here for your return, but I would not allow it. I think — they had bills to be paid."

A look of despair crossed Lilla's face, but she said nothing. Indebtedness seemed more degrading now to her than it formerly did.

"You never tell me about these things," went on Mrs. Miller, "and yet I am your cousin. I might help you."

"I am afraid not. I owe a great deal."

"How much is a great deal?" said Mrs. Miller quietly.

"I am paying one man a hundred and twenty dollars a month interest."

"What is the rate?"

Lilla colored.

"Eight per cent. — a month," she said at last.

Mrs. Miller had heard this before from Willcox, but wished to make Lilla tell her.

"Can you guess who the other creditor may be?"

"He might be any one of half a dozen."

"You will tell me everything in detail this even-

ing, will you not? I know we can improve the situation a little."

Lilla looked very grateful, and said meekly: —

"I know I 'm a perfect fool in these matters. I am furious enough sometimes to murder them all, but I can't see my way out. It goes from bad to worse."

Mrs. Miller was pleased with her success in introducing this delicate subject. She felt that she had done well to defer it till Lilla herself felt the pressure of her indebtedness. Now she was willing to put off further talk till evening.

"Did you meet Mrs. Thomson?" she asked. "She has the operation at the dentist's to-day, and was looking for you."

"Why, I was to go with her," said Lilla, looking guilty.

"Well, she has her husband."

"Oh, he is far worse than no one," said Lilla, drawing on her gloves again. "I think I can get there in time now. And," she added, with a slight hesitation, coming back again from the door, "I have made an engagement, forgetting this one. I will leave a note here. Will you tell Annie to give it to Mr. Robertson when he comes?"

The evening deliberations on Lilla's finances were brought to a head by the reappearance of the two creditors. Willcox was absent that evening, having gone to Southfields.

"It 's very unlucky," said Lilla. "Mr. Willcox offered once to let me borrow this money, or part of it, of him at a reasonable rate. I declined it then,

but I must do it now; I can't keep up with the interest any more. I have n't been able to catch him lately. He is so busy."

"Perhaps he has n't the money to lend, now he is engaged," said Mrs. Miller.

"I think he has," said Lilla hopefully.

After much discussion, the two women adopted a plan of procedure. The money-lender was induced to defer his claim till Willcox's return. An installment on the other bill was paid by both, Lilla promising to part with some jewelry to refund Mrs. Miller's loan.

"I did not think these little things worth selling," she explained. "They will bring scarcely fifty dollars all together. My valuable things have almost all gone."

When the two creditors had gone, Mrs. Miller looked much relieved. Lilla was less cheerful; her concessions had not come easy to her.

"If Mr. Willcox will really rid you of this wretched money-lender," said Mrs. Miller, "you will do pretty well now. On the first of September, your next remittance is due. We will then pay an equal per cent. on all these debts, reserving enough for your clothing and necessary expenses. I can't very well lend you money, but your board here need not trouble you. Perhaps you can give me a little help in my letters and accounts, which are always behindhand. Then there is Elsa. Must you be paying her wages?"

"I don't," said Lilla; smiling. "I have n't any to pay her."

"Well, her board is a tax on you," said Mrs. Miller, politely concealing the fact that of late neither Elsa's board nor her own had weighed much on Miss Wilton. "You must spare her to me, I think. I will give her a chambermaid's wages, and she can still do something for you. With patience, dear, patience and care, you will yet pay your creditors."

"I'd rather horsewhip than pay them," said Lilla with a grimace. "However, I am going to do as you say."

That evening, as Elsa was brushing out Miss Wilton's soft brown hair, she was told of the change proposed in her occupations. When Lilla wished to be gracious, she knew how to be, and she stated the matter with much affectionate appreciation of her own dependence on the attentions to which she was now accustomed. To her surprise, Elsa would not agree to the change. She said she would do whatever work Miss Wilton asked of her, but would not take pay of any one else. Mrs. Miller might pay Miss Wilton for her services, but Elsa wished no doubt raised as to whose service she was in. As she could not be laughed or scolded from this position, Lilla gave in, and acknowledged the devotion by a passing caress as she said: —

"You must have your own way, then. Mrs. Miller will pay me what you are worth to her, and I will pay you what you are worth to me, which in future will be nothing at all. It is a very excellent arrangement."

It continued to be very hard to secure an inter-

view with Willcox. His mother had a second stroke of paralysis, which proved fatal. He with Bessie went up to New Hampshire, though too late to carry any pleasure to the unconscious sufferer. After the funeral Bessie had returned to Southfields, and Willcox had been away on business. He was busy enough, too, with his private affairs, but at length appeared at Mrs. Miller's, and Lilla eagerly laid hold of him and stated her situation, reminding him of his offer.

Willcox's face grew dark, and Lilla added hastily:

"At a good rate of interest, of course. Would n't it be a sort of investment for you?"

Willcox gave a sudden, hard laugh at her innocence.

"Don't you think that a house to live in and the necessities of the business which supports me are sufficiently good investments?"

Lilla shrank back. She had never before heard him speak so sharply. Was his happiness going to make him selfish?

"Excuse me," she said, then stopped, too much hurt to say more.

"I offered it, I know, Miss Wilton," went on Willcox in a tone of apology, "but even then scarcely as an investment, and now my position has changed. I should like to put it before you, and let you see for yourself. I am to be married in about four weeks. Miss Folsom has generously given her consent to an arrangement by which my father, who is now quite alone, is to live with us in New York. He is old and feeble and must be made

comfortable on one floor; it is hardship enough already to make him leave his home. This will make necessary a more expensive house than we at first thought of taking, and I shall be fortunate if I keep out of debt myself."

If Willcox expected Lilla to accept cordially his own point of view, he was disappointed. She had not quite the unselfishness for that and listened silently, till Willcox brought himself to a standstill with a sudden smiting of the heart.

"This is one view of the matter," he said, with evident agitation. "To tell the truth I have spoken of it to Miss Folsom, as Mrs. Miller had given me a hint on the subject. My responsibilities are greater now, of course. I cannot act simply to please myself, as I used to do. You know we are speaking of a considerable sum."

Lilla continued to stare gloomily at the floor. She was certainly rather cruel on the soft-hearted Willcox. He rose and plunged his hands in his pockets, but was silent. At last Lilla said somewhat cynically: —

"Don't give yourself further anxiety, Mr. Willcox. I have no claim on you whatever, and should not have asked it."

"You have a claim on me," said Willcox, wincing at her words. "People in need have a claim on those not in need. Don't worry too much over what I 've just said. It was only one view of the matter. Miss Folsom and I will talk it over again."

Lilla made no answer. If this new couple were to have but one view of the matter, she began to

have a suspicion whose view it would be. She had often heard that marriage made people selfish.

"Don't worry," repeated Willcox softly. "People were made to stand by each other while they can. I am going to Southfields next Sunday. You will get a line from me soon."

The note when it came was as follows: —

MY DEAR MISS WILTON, — This is a peculiarly hard time for me to lay my hand on ready money. Yet it may be that the sale of the property in New Hampshire may give me a chance to help you. While I should not wish you to neglect any surer means of securing a loan, I cannot yet refuse myself the hope of being your creditor.

Believe me, as ever,

Most faithfully yours,

JAMES WILLCOX.

This short note did not promise any very prompt assistance, and the money — the interest, at least, — must be at hand within a few days. Lilla's heart swelled with bitterness at the thought that to get this she must part with something more and with a good deal. Nothing brought its worth at such times, and now she had nothing but what she needed. When she had been deeper in debt than now, she had not undergone such humiliation. The mere fact that she lived in the economical way enjoined by Mrs. Miller and all her present advisers made tradespeople distrustful. If she managed in her own way, she could carry a far greater indebtedness

and live meanwhile in comfort. Still, this was possibly the more honest way.

She had received a note from Robertson saying that he had gone suddenly to Staten Island because Seton had been taken down with a fever. The heat in New York during the past few days had been terrific. Fond as she herself was of hot weather, she had not cared to go out much, and she was thankful that Robertson, who felt it so much, was out of town. How absurdly she had talked to him at their last meeting! She often thought him a trifle enthusiastic in his plans and theories of life, but on this occasion it was she who had dropped into eloquence, — another piece of acting of course, an echo of his own thoughts, had he but recognized it; or was it an insight, an inspiration? He had listened intently, and in his note from Staten Island had alluded to this conversation. She now looked for his note, to see what he had said. She was not sentimentally inclined and seldom kept notes, but she did not remember destroying this one and at last found it. These were the words she looked for: —

"Two are better than one. One can defy the world; two can differ from the world without defying it. I suppose a little sympathy might make even a red revolutionist turn from his underground plottings to the slower, more kindly processes of the sunlight and upper air."

It was now three days since she had had this note. As Seton was among friends, Arnold would not probably stay long with him, especially as he had

much business in town. He might be home this very afternoon.

As she was thinking this, some one knocked, and then she remembered hearing the door-bell a few minutes before. Mrs. Miller's waitress was at the door, and said there was a gentleman downstairs to see her. Lilla stood looking at her with eyes shining. It was a luxury to have such good things within one's grasp and then delay to take them.

"Is the south sitting-room occupied?" she asked at last.

"No, nobody 's there, mum."

"Then show the gentleman into that room."

Howard Raynor had of late been very unfortunate in his attempts to see Miss Wilton. "Out" or "Engaged" had been his constant answer at the door. It did not take him long to understand this bad luck, but he persisted in his visits, and this day, when the servant-girl who opened was a stranger to him, he refused to give his name, and had himself announced as we have seen. It was a trick, and deserved the fate of a trick, but he was not prepared for the shudder of disgust and resentment that passed over Miss Wilton's face as she opened the door. For a moment she seemed about to leave at once, then with an ominous contraction of the lips she crossed the room and turned to face him.

"What is your errand?" she asked shortly.

"I — I" — stammered Raynor — "I have heard that you are in need of money."

"You are misinformed."

"Mr. Davids has two of your rings."

"And I his money. Have you any other errand?"

"I hoped to be of service to you once more, and I should be glad to learn what I have done to deserve a dog's treatment."

"You got in here by a lie."

"A lie?"

"I was told a gentleman wished to see me."

A curse sprang to Raynor's lips. Lilla smiled darkly. He had sealed his fate now.

"You 'll be sorry for this," he said, after a struggle. "I don't suppose I am a gentleman, but you have no cause to think otherwise, or had none when you spoke. I 'm not a gentleman, and you 'll be sorry for this."

He went out, closing the door behind him. Lilla stood thinking. She would have felt some remorse, except for his oath. He had struck back, as it were, had matched her innuendo with his insolence, and it was now an even thing, and she was rid of an acquaintance so disreputable. She breathed more freely, and having heard during this short altercation what was probably the postman's ring, she went to the head of the stairs to see if there might not be a letter from Robertson. To her surprise Howard Raynor was still by the door, and was actually looking over the letters. An indignant exclamation escaped from her, and he fled from the house. She was almost glad after this that the expected note was not there. The rascal might have known the writing, as he was very shrewd in such espionage.

Day after day passed, and no news came from Robertson. Was he ill himself? If he were, he might have got some one to write to her. She went about with a heavy weight constantly on her mind. She kept up diligently her new endeavors to be good, as she called it. She tried to recognize in her thoughts the nearness and fatherhood of the God she had always believed in. At the Sunday-school, she spoke to the children of the beautiful world and the loving relations of human life as God's world and God's tender providence. Arnold had said it made him happy to think of her with the children, and it would perhaps be there that he would first look for her on his return. On those dull, hot Sundays, when all the windows of the mission-room were thrown open without admitting a breath of fresh air, but instead the continual clatter of street cries and noises, she never heard the quieter roll of carriage-wheels without thinking that Arnold might be coming.

Two weeks passed without a sign. Lilla woke one morning with the thought that it was now just a fortnight since he had written from Staten Island. He had written as if the absence of a few days required explanation. Lilla kept reminding herself of this, for she had now lost the assurance with which she had at first believed that something unusual underlay this silence. He had left her once before. This remembrance had come to her like the stab of a dagger. He had left her suddenly, and by accident only had she seen him when he begged off from the coach-drive. Then he must have car-

ried with him the consciousness that he was wounding her; now there would be no treachery on his conscience. No friendship had ever been freer from the touch of passion than that he had recently shown her. He had come to her continually, indeed, had talked freely of his thoughts, but had he been planning to leave her, he could not have guarded himself more carefully from sentiment. This could not mean that he recognized no personal tie between them. Did men become so enamored of thought, of ideas, that they could share this intellectual life with one as readily as with another? Was there no heart, because there was something more than heart? The more she thought, under the sore pressure of separation and starvation, the more easily could she believe that he had determined to keep himself free from all ties, however congenial, and had planned this unexplained absence to warn her of his independence. He had done it before; this was the one hard fact. He had some life in mind in which a woman's friendship would be a drag. He had said that two were better than one, but at heart he believed that one could accomplish the most. He was right; he was wiser than he knew; for she was but an imitator of real goodness. Her teaching had no longer any power or enthusiasm about it: her words were becoming mockeries; she had no love for goodness, it was only love for — it was not love at all.

It was a dark, rainy afternoon. Lilla stood in the wainscoted sitting-room, looking down on the scraggly locust-tree in the back yard. She had come downstairs in the vain hope of finding some one to

divert her from useless thoughts. Mrs. Miller was talking earnestly in her office, but otherwise the house was quiet. The rain varied between a drizzle and a pour, and the flagstones were dark and wet. The long summer twilight was coming on. The door-bell rang as she stood there with her forehead on the window-pane, but she had drilled herself not to think every bell was Arnold or a note from Arnold. She was still by the window when Elsa came to the door.

"A gentleman wishes to see Mademoiselle."

"Now, what do you mean by that?" said Lilla, turning sharply upon her. "Can't you give people their names?"

"It is Mr. Gardiner."

Mr. Gardiner, whom she had not seen since March, and whom she had lately refused to see! She hesitated.

"You may ask him to come up," she said at last, and then she stood where she was till Gardiner came in, hat in hand, with roguishly humble eyes.

"I deserve it, Miss Wilton," he said. "Let the thunderbolts fly. I have disregarded your polite note, and here I am. Don't hear me, but strike."

The sight of his friendly face and pleasant brown eyes was very welcome.

"I am glad to see you," she said. "I simply forewarned you that we should be sure to quarrel sooner or later. You are risking that."

There was an evident though subtle change in Gardiner since their last meeting. His letter had intimated that his fortunes had changed for the better; his looks confirmed it. They showed the marks

of both cares and success. The thinner hair on his forehead suggested the partial baldness which years would bring. She thought that even in six months he had gained distinction both in face and manner. With these changes Lilla was pleased to find much that was unchanged. It was impossible to mistake his pleasure in seeing her again, and he was also very amusing. She had sat so long at Mrs. Miller's table that she had forgotten how light and clever conversation might be made, and gave Gardiner the credit of originality for much that was merely the social currency of the moment.

Their talk was not wholly trivial. It was never hard with Gardiner to break through superficialities, neither was there danger, when on this ground of interesting fact and experience, of slumping through to the regions of theory and sentiment. For Gardiner, the round world he lived on was both high and deep enough.

Lilla had laughed more heartily than for weeks before, when Gardiner rose to take his leave.

"I hope my letter did not seem impertinent," he said, — "too abominably frank. I should not have dared to say to most women that I had forgotten them in my business. Perhaps I should not have said it to you."

"I like flattery as well as another woman," said Lilla, "when there is any illusion in it. Here, your actions took the ground from under you."

"I was a precious fool to waste so many months on a fit of ill-temper."

"Were you really much offended?"

"Offended! Indeed I was. It would flatter my feelings even now, if you would some day yet apologize."

Miss Wilton smiled.

"There is no hope of it, I suppose," continued Gardiner; "I have submitted unconditionally, and to-day have bought my own rosebud, as you see."

"Your change of circumstances is obvious."

"From a beggar to a millionaire, is n't it? Possibly the millionaire might prove the more successful beggar."

"The question can't be tested," said Lilla, laughing. "I have n't a rose to my name."

"It would be a Christian revenge to send you a few."

"Do; I am pining for flowers."

When he had gone, Lilla returned to her room in a much gayer mood. It had done her good to chat and laugh so foolishly. She felt as if she had been to some festivity. Gardiner had told her of some friends of his by the name of Vanderzee. Jack Vanderzee was now in town settling his uncle's estate. Two of Jack's sisters were with him, picnicking, as it were, in the deserted Vanderzee mansion. Gardiner described them as very charming women. The father and mother were at the seashore with an invalid aunt. Gardiner asked permission to bring Jack Vanderzee to see her, and Lilla consented, pleased with this break in her quiet life.

The arrival of the roses the next morning was a pleasant reminder of Gardiner's visit. Lilla had given him a good many thoughts since the day be-

fore. There was certainly a very good side to him. He had a very strong will, as she had occasion to know. She knew, too, that he was thoroughly committed to the work of making money, and imagined that his method might at times be sharp and thorough. To her he had always been kind, and her wealth or poverty mattered nothing to him.

It was scarcely ten days after Gardiner's visit when Lilla went to dine with his friends. Miss Vanderzee had sent her card and begged her to come and make their acquaintance in an informal way, and Jack Vanderzee, the bearer of the message, had returned with her consent. Lilla expected an amusing evening, and was not disappointed. She found herself one of five at a round table in a bare but brilliantly-lighted dining-room. There were two Miss Vanderzees, and neither of them was inclined to be at all ceremonious with their new acquaintance. They all called Gardiner by his middle name, Jeffreys, which had an odd sound to Lilla's ear. He on the contrary clung rigidly to Miss Clara and Miss Belle, which custom Jack mimicked in derision. Gardiner was so silent that Lilla at first thought him displeased with something, but she discovered that the Vanderzees' gift of language was such as to silence almost any one, and that Gardiner was far from displeased. She began to think that her own uninventive conversation must often appear stupid to him by contrast, yet before long she satisfied herself not only that his thoughts were really all on her, but that he was quite willing to have the fact apparent to his friends.

After dinner they all passed together to the front room, a long drawing-room, at the nearer end of which was placed a table with cigars and lights as well as a few decanters of wine and liquors. The two sisters seemed inclined to linger here, but Lilla, moved by some spirit of rebellion, made an excuse to gain the other end of the room, whither she was followed by Clara Vanderzee. In a few moments Gardiner came over, cigar in hand.

"May I bring my cigar?" he asked.

"Will it trouble you?" said Miss Vanderzee, looking at Lilla. "It seems cruel to banish the smokers to the billiard-room. Perhaps you dislike it, however."

"Not at this distance," said Lilla perversely. As a matter of fact, she liked the smell of tobacco. Gardiner strolled away, and soon reappeared without his cigar.

The conversation that followed was almost entirely on one subject. Clara Vanderzee began it by discussing the provisions of a will lately probated. Lilla remembered that the settlement of an estate was the cause of the Vanderzees' present sojourn in New York, but she was struck by the knowledge displayed by the speaker as to fortunes and bequests of a much earlier date. Whether the income of the whole had been divided among the children, or whether stocks and bonds had been dealt about impartially, and whether there were direct legacies to be deducted, all seemed transparently clear to the eyes of this astute maiden. Lilla became somewhat dazed at the number of fortunes in the hundred

thousands which were flying about, and wondered that she herself should be so ignorant as to her own friends. She could not even recall the amount of Mr. Meredith's windfall of the preceding winter. Money was a pretty accurate measure of the impression a man's ability makes on the world. Poverty, therefore, did have in it something of disgrace.

It pleased Lilla, however, that Gardiner, though well-informed, was not as much absorbed as his neighbor in these subjects. He answered her questions, but made very little comment.

"Why, see what I have found!" exclaimed suddenly some one behind Lilla. Belle Vanderzee had come noiselessly across the room, and now interrupted them. "Here is poor Jeffrey's cigar, all out. I found it on the mantelpiece. I know it is on your account, Miss Wilton. He always smokes two, at least; but how should you know! I 've brought a match to light it for him, or perhaps you will, as it went out for your sake."

With an arch look Belle held the match over Miss Wilton's shoulder, but Gardiner caught it from her, giving her a glance of severe disapproval, at which Belle's eyebrows went still higher.

"You are much too indulgent to us sinners," said Gardiner, taking his seat again. "Jack and I are fast becoming spoilt for general society."

"Please light your cigar; it will not trouble me," said Lilla with an access of graciousness.

"I have no desire for it," said Gardiner, trying to ignore Belle's attempts to form noiselessly with her lips her favorite ejaculation, "That 's a fib."

"Jeffreys means to say," said Belle, moving off, "that the ladies are a sufficient sedative. He is always getting off some ugly double-entendre like that, and then chuckles to himself over it when he is alone."

"She is simply incurable," said Clara apologetically. "Jeffreys, do get us a taste of that curaçao. Bring the whole stand, please."

A few minutes later, Jack having gone upstairs, Belle was yawning alone over a novel at the farther end of the room. Clara glided across to her, and an altercation followed between the two sisters, which resulted in Belle's submission and the appearance of a cribbage-board.

This very palpable piece of management did not displease Lilla. It was part of the fun that Gardiner's devotion was so well recognized, and it seemed to cause him no embarrassment. Lilla admitted to herself that it was pleasant in these degenerate days to find a man so ready to commit himself, and this Gardiner did in everything but words.

When Lilla announced that she must leave, Miss Vanderzee came forward with expressions of regret. She spoke very charmingly, with the clear musical utterance so seldom found in the North.

"I shall take for granted," she said, "that this pleasure is mutual. Mr. Gardiner tells me that you are just now in somewhat uncongenial surroundings. We, too, shall be left high and dry for a fortnight or more in this hot city. The conclusion is obvious. You must be as much as possible one of our party. We shall send for you unceremoniously.

I will not even let you make the appropriate answer, but instead have a health to propose. Fill up the glasses, Jeffreys; and, Belle, go and tell Jack I want him down for a moment."

Gardiner and Belle obeyed orders, though evidently both surprised. When Jack appeared, Clara lifted her glass.

"Are we ready? Ladies and gentlemen: we are all more or less familiar with the name of a certain Western railroad, the uncertain value of which has in past years brought grief to many of our hearts. Two years ago the declining interests of this corporation fell into more able hands. The stock is now selling at a premium; the dividends are regular. The grateful stockholders have elected to the presidency of their road the man who has accomplished all this. His name will appear with honor in the morning papers; his friends will honor it to-night. I give you the health of Thomas Jeffreys Gardiner."

"I congratulate you," said Jack Vanderzee, after the toast had been enthusiastically honored. "This is my first knowledge of it."

"There is something uncanny about your sister," replied Gardiner. "The evening mail has just brought me the official notification."

Miss Vanderzee laughed but did not explain, and Belle immediately applied herself to discover what useful privileges might be attached to the friendship of a railroad president. After much light-hearted chaffing, Lilla again said that she must go, and they all accompanied her to the hall. Here Elsa was waiting, but Gardiner insisted on escorting Miss Wilton to her own door.

The walk through the cool, deserted streets was very pleasant. Gardiner expressed himself warmly about the family they had just left.

"They are very unconventional, as you will soon see. To-night they were somewhat on their good behavior. But under it all they are thoroughly right and straight. It is really the license of good breeding. Still," continued Gardiner, with a glance at his companion, "there are varying types of manners. I am willing that high sentiment should insist on its own code, — more than willing, even."

Before they reached Mrs. Miller's, an unpleasant incident gave a new turn to the conversation. They saw ahead of them a dim, ragged object sitting on a doorstep. It was a man, who started to walk on as they drew near, then turned and begged money for a night's lodging. Gardiner elbowed him aside without a word.

"Poor fellow!" said Lilla, after they were out of hearing. "It does no good, I suppose, to give him money."

"Did n't you smell the whiskey?" said Gardiner scornfully. "Charity is merely a tribute to one's own feelings. It never does any good."

"You do not mean quite that," said Lilla.

"It sometimes changes the locality of suffering; that 's about all. The world is built on a base of misery. It has to be. It is the shining image with the feet of clay. It is of no use teaching even common honesty till a man is above this lowest level, nor the finer shades of honor till he is in still more comfortable circumstances. We really are the fortunate

ones, for we have a chance to hide our selfishness, — some of us, perhaps, to throw it overboard. Let us appreciate our good fortune."

"And not help the unfortunate?"

"Oh yes; it 's a tribute to our own peace of mind to relieve the suffering which we see; but the universal rule is and must be to see as little of it as possible, for it is proved every day that our charity does no good. It is really a disguised form of self-indulgence."

"What a horrible belief!" exclaimed Lilla.

"Well, you must remember that this underlying suffering is the cause of the activity and enterprise of the race. What a beautiful world is built above it! What lovely homes, what worth of character, what unselfishness between friends, what glories of art and science! These things are worth your enthusiasm. The human chaos below really calls for little sympathy; those that know it best are the least sentimental about it. These men, if we are to call them so, are base in their wishes, and from day to day have their reward and their pleasure, while we deny ourselves daily in a way they could not be made to understand. The moment any one of them does wish for better things, he can have them on the same terms, — self-denial."

"I suppose that is true," said Lilla, "but how can they understand a better life unless some one teaches them?"

"They won't understand if they are taught. As I say, virtue is a plant which cannot grow except in the soil of well-being."

Lilla dropped the argument. This was not Mr. Robertson's view, but it was the one most naturally deduced from the facts. The miserable were always the churchless, the vagabond, the criminal; and the well-to-do were always sending religious missions to show them, usually in vain, what they ought to believe and to do.

"I am glad," said Gardiner, interrupting her reverie as they stopped at Mrs. Miller's door,—"I am glad you knew me before I had won any success. I was a great ass then, of course, but I think we were friends from the very day when Richard Garth so delicately forced my acquaintance on you; and I value your friendship more than that of any other woman."

Lilla's lip curled a little when the door had closed between them. "A judicious statement!" she said to herself. "For the stage at which we have arrived, a moderate, well-planted step ahead!"

The first of September was a date to which Lilla had looked forward for several weeks. It was the time of her quarterly remittance, to begin with, which Mrs. Miller was to divide among her various hungry creditors, leaving, it was to be hoped, a balance to the equally hungry owner; and it was also the day on which Robertson was to have started for the Adirondacks with his brother Philip. If, by that time, she had no word from him, she would put a violent end to this terrible watching, which, in spite of herself, she still carried on. One look into his face would undo so much of perplexity and evil, and surely, whatever had been distracting him from her

and from his work (for she had taken pains to learn if he had been at all at his usual occupations), he must some day remember her and come once more, if only for a more courteous leave-taking.

When the day had passed without sign, she found herself possessed by a new fear. Some accident might have occurred to him. Who was there to tell her if it were so? Miss Brigham might be equally uninformed. It was not likely, but it was possible. His family was away, and as far as she knew, there was no one to take alarm if he mysteriously disappeared, as men had done before now. This new, dreadful fear had its alleviating side, as Lilla discovered, when after a night of such dread, the morning brought back her less sentimental, less trusting theory. She acted, nevertheless, on her fear. She determined to go to see Miss Granger, because she knew that Mr. Robertson had gone to her to get work for a poor woman as a model. If Miss Granger knew nothing, she might make up her mind to write to Mrs. Meredith and inquire about Mr. Seton's illness.

Lilla had never before been to Miss Granger's apartment, and when shown into the pleasant sitting-room, now darkened with shutters, she could not know how changed and desolate it seemed to its solitary mistress. Bessie's piano had gone, and the gap was unfilled. Indeed, the room was little visited except by the housemaid, for the artist kept herself diligently at work in her studio.

Lilla had provided an excuse for her visit in some message from Mrs. Miller, but it was unnecessary.

She found herself welcomed as if by a prisoner in solitary confinement. Few in modern times languish in prisons of stone, but what numbers are practically imprisoned, by their sensitive poverty, their dread of ruder society than they formerly enjoyed, or even by the negative action, as one might say, of what is called the institution of the family. Their own families being scattered, they are at once alone, and the institution just mentioned tends to throw those who can afford it into a life of solitude. Miss Granger would have said that she preferred solitude, but often when her work was done and her tears shed for the time being, she would walk out, oppressed by a crying hunger for companionship. She wished that children would speak to her in the street, but her exterior was gaunt and sad, and she did not know how to speak to them herself without frightening them.

Any voluntary visit would bring sunshine to such loneliness, and Lilla appealed as well to the artist in her. Miss Granger had never forgotten Bessie's harsh opinion of Miss Wilton, but this had been one of the few cases where she had held her own ground, and decided that her clear-sighted little friend was wrong. The generous-minded maiden lady had drawn freely on her imagination in picturing the difficulties which would beset the path of a woman so beautiful. How hard it must be to deal even-handed justice, the justice of smiles and glances, to half a dozen susceptible, hot-headed lovers! How can she refuse herself the almost unavoidable pleasure of being enchanting to each in turn, or how can

she always judge rightly and measure a man with the accurate, dispassionate eye of the woman he has never cared to please! It was probably some superficial mistake of this kind that had drawn her into Mr. Raynor's questionable acquaintance and induced Bessie's suspicion.

Miss Granger's welcome was, therefore, most cordial, and, Lilla having inquired after Mrs. Willcox, she gave her an account of the pretty little wedding at Southfields.

"As usual Bessie managed and thought for every one, though it was her own wedding-day. Mr. Willcox was, I fear, of not much help. He is n't very clever, is he? Don't you think Bessie is mistaken in him? He was dreadful about the service. Bessie had taught it to him word for word, and you know in any case, he has only to say what the clergyman says first, but he kept them waiting at almost every response, and I was thankful when he had said enough to be legally married. He was in a sort of daze all the day. Bessie's aunt said it was positively useless to introduce him to anybody, for he made no effort to speak. Mrs. Meredith was the only stranger who got a word out of him."

"You must remember that he is very much in love."

"You think that is it? I am glad. I feared that for once Bessie had made a mistake."

"On the contrary, she has probably never shown more wisdom. He is a good man, and she will learn it every year more thoroughly."

"I am ever so glad to hear this, and it is nice to

see one of Bessie's capacity with a little money to do with at last. There is nothing she would enjoy more than furnishing a house. She has fought the world very bravely and put up with every sort of self-denial, and really deserves a good home. I am thankful if, besides, she is to have a good husband."

While Lilla was struggling with herself to know how to introduce the matter she had at heart, Miss Granger put her hand timidly on her arm.

"Do you know you have something to forgive me? I have stolen something from you. Will you come up to my studio and see?"

Lilla went with great curiosity, and there discovered a memory sketch of herself. The picture, even in its unfinished state, was very complimentary. The forehead was finely formed, the whole face indeed being conceived in a spirit more noble than the original wholly justified. The hair and coloring were charming, and in the eyes happiness sat enthroned.

Lilla dropped into a chair, silenced for the moment, while Miss Granger looked as steadily at her.

"As a portrait I fear it is a satire," said Lilla at last.

"It lacks a great deal, but I have had no chance. It will take a woman to paint you. I can learn, I think, a self-denial which no man would wish to learn."

"I cannot see how you caught a likeness at all, with no sitting."

"I have had help; your maid, Elsa, gave me some

valuable points when she came here one day on an errand. But my best help was" — Miss Granger deliberately went forward and touched the picture with her handkerchief before she finished her sentence — "from Mr. Robertson."

Lilla started and flushed, but fortunately the artist's back was turned.

"Is he an art critic?"

"He is a close observer. With an artist's training he might have painted it himself."

"When was he here?"

"More than once."

"The last time?"

"A few weeks ago. The second day after my model left. He came in, indeed, on her account."

"A few weeks ago!" That would be since she had seen him. He had been in town, then. Of course he had. She knew it all the time.

"I can fix the date for you," went on Miss Granger, still with her back to her guest. "I keep a record with my models. Her last day was July 27. Mr. Robertson came in on the 29th."

That was five days after he had left for Staten Island and now over a month ago. Lilla had known it must be so. Though both sick and miserable, she tried to say something.

"He had been out of town, I think."

"Yes, I think he said so. He had just come then from a ride in the Park. I know he said the day was a cold one for July. He had heard that his protegée had left me, and wished to know what I had to say of her. He again looked a long time at

this sketch, and said I had profited by his hints. He said very little except that."

Miss Granger cudgeled her brains in vain to remember anything more of interest, but her guest changed the subject, and soon rose to leave. The artist accompanied her downstairs with more of devout admiration and humility in her heart than an elderly woman could well express to a younger one.

"If I could but do justice to the noble women of my own country, it would be all I could ask. Thank you for coming, dear. If you ever wish to come again, you will make my heart glad."

Lilla departed with little answer. Her whole heart was in rebellion against the man on whom she had wasted so many aching thoughts. She had been far too credulous as to the possibilities of human character. Was it not worse than a fault, this unnatural, cold-hearted style of goodness, which made him devote himself to finding work for a needy woman, while ignoring needs more spiritual and more real? It was the fault of the over-religious man, who cultivates his conscience till his heart sinks into insignificance, who has surrendered the first elements of manhood, and becomes incapable at length of self-sacrifice from the lack of a real self to be sacrificed. If this were not the explanation, there was but one other, the one most painful and most probable, and the only consolation to her pride was that at every step in this renewal of their acquaintance, he had taken the initiative.

CHAPTER XV.

SOME days later Lilla was sitting in her own room in the evening, better pleased with herself than she had been before for many a day. She was free, to begin with, bound to no one, and the events of the past week, Miss Vanderzee's friendliness, and Gardiner's evident enthrallment gave an increased value to her freedom. She would not lightly surrender this independence.

Gardiner was a man not only of strong will, but of strong prejudices. Humility and devotion to her were not the only sentiments in his heart and eyes, nor as engrossing as they should be. He had a great respect for himself, equaled, perhaps, by his admiration for her, were it not for superadded theories of the natural sovereignty of man over woman, which gave a tinge of obstinacy even to his softest speeches. There were times, indeed, when these theories stood him in no good stead, and his masculine heart turned traitor within him. This was none too often, she thought.

Her present surroundings were growing distasteful to her. She had for some weeks given up her Sunday-school class. She was intensely ashamed of herself for this, but really she had nothing to say to the children. Her words sounded to her like hypocritical cant, and it enraged her to go through with

it. Gardiner was right in calling her fellow-boarders "queer." Mrs. Miller evidently expected daily help from her, had once asked her to talk with some prospective boarders. Lilla had indignantly declined, and the event had not increased the pleasantness of their relations.

In the matter of her remittance, too, she had pleased herself rather than Mrs. Miller, the latter feeling that Lilla's creditors had not received what they had really been promised. Lilla felt independent with what she had kept, and secretly contemplated a change of residence. It was absurd for a woman with her income to live like a beggar. Indeed, had it been simply a question of money, she would have left at once; she felt, however, that to do so would be to follow rather too blindly Gardiner's wishes, for in spite of his polite concealment of his feelings, she knew that he frequently found his position excessively awkward. Alas, the safeguard which Lilla's pride thus threw around her involved finances was not destined long to last.

Her present dissatisfaction and annoyance extended even to Elsa. It was not easy for her to surrender so much of Elsa's time to another; indeed, it would have been far easier to wait on herself, had she had no claim at all on Elsa's attentions. In some inscrutable way she had discovered that Elsa had an opinion, and one very unfavorable, as to Gardiner. It often fell to her to announce him, and possibly her voice betrayed her. In former days Elsa had, indeed, taken a different view of the matter; beside the frivolous, possibly dissipated young spendthrifts

who had for a time haunted Miss Wilton's footsteps, Mr. Gardiner had seemed the one hopeful element of the situation. Now it was true that she distrusted and feared him, but she had not thought herself detected by her mistress.

One Sunday Lilla was dressing for an evening at home and, the transparent black lace gathered about her neck seeming to need some brooch or simple gold pin, Elsa turned to the drawer that held Miss Wilton's impoverished store of jewelry. Lilla, however, called her back, holding out a slight lace-pin headed with a cluster of sapphires and diamonds. Elsa took it with a sudden terror at her heart. Whose gift was this? Her hand trembled a little, and she bungled at her task. Lilla, who was already not in the best of tempers, took it from her abruptly and with a side glance at her long face. Elsa turned away, and, though she struggled bravely, there were tears in her eyes the next time she met Miss Wilton's look.

"This is too bad," exclaimed the latter. "My affairs seem to be every one's but my own. Will you tell me what my crime is on this particular occasion?"

Elsa made no answer.

"I am the only judge as to what I spend," continued Lilla haughtily. "I will stand no criticism, either in words or tears."

"Mademoiselle misunderstands me," said Elsa, surprised. "Or rather, I misunderstood. I did not know it was a purchase."

"What then?" asked Lilla, and an ominous si-

lence followed. Elsa dared not apologize, and Miss Wilton left the room without further comment.

The next day Lilla went shopping with Miss Vanderzee, and late in the afternoon was left by the latter at Mrs. Miller's door. Inside, Lilla found a letter addressed by Willcox and, with the quick conviction that he at last was ready with his loan, she was carrying the letter unopened upstairs when she was stopped by Mrs. Miller, who opened a door at the end of the passage and called her into the kitchen. Lilla went unwillingly, feeling that something disagreeable was to come; for the last few days nothing had gone right between her and Mrs. Miller. She now stood in the kitchen doorway, and Mrs. Miller began to speak while she threw open the ovens.

"Some boxes have been taken up to your room. They looked like dressmakers' boxes."

"I expected some," said Lilla, as if surprised at her cousin's tone.

"You expected some," repeated Mrs. Miller with peculiar emphasis. "Then you expected this bill also," — touching it with her elbow as her hands were buttery.

"You have opened my letter?"

"Not at all. The dressmaker's name is printed on the envelope."

Lilla opened it, and Mrs. Miller asked briefly: —

"What is the amount?"

Lilla looked up, much annoyed.

"I don't like to be disagreeable, but I do not see what right you have to put that question."

"I am glad that such an answer is disagreeable to

you," said Mrs. Miller gently. Then, perceiving that nothing but plain language would answer with Lilla, she added dryly: —

"I believe that eighty-five dollars last month, and your board and lodging since, with ten dollars for pocket-money for such items as pins, stamps, and horse-cars is so far the extent of my interest in your expenses."

Lilla laughed outright.

"You have me there, I admit."

"May I see the bill, then?"

"I should think," said Lilla, smiling, "that after last month's experience you would be more than ready to forego that pleasure."

"Am I to see the bill?" repeated Mrs. Miller grimly. She had determined to have a clear understanding with Lilla, and, since gentle words had no effect, to use the language of compulsion.

"If you wish," returned Lilla. "It need not trouble you. There is no necessity of paying it for months yet."

She laid the bill open before her cousin, then withdrew it hastily, seeing the look of displeasure which crossed Mrs. Miller's face.

"Now you have satisfied your curiosity in a matter which will never concern you. It can wait months, as I say."

"Oh, Lilla," exclaimed Mrs. Miller recovering her speech, "are you positively insane? Do be frank with me. Have you resources beyond those you have confessed to me? If not, it is wicked, wicked, for you to incur such bills. You must have

some common sense left. You cannot be quite such a fool as you pretend to be."

Lilla was disconcerted by this appeal, and as she hesitated, Mrs. Miller followed up her advantage.

"Don't you remember that your debts are already overwhelming without this addition? I would not speak so, if you were in some emergency; but this is in the ordinary line of expenditure. How can you think of ordering such expensive dresses?"

"You forget that I have four thousand a year to spend. I can afford many expensive dresses."

"Four thousand a year is not a large income," said Mrs. Miller boldly. "No, it would be called small among the people with whom you associate. You cannot spend as they do, even when out of debt. Now, you cannot be said to have any income at all. The Bible says, 'The borrower is servant to the lender.' Your money, at least, is certainly not your own."

Lilla laughed again, — not pleasantly, either.

"You are really entertaining," she said at last.

"That is more than I hoped to be," said Mrs. Miller gravely. "I have made up my mind at all events to be explicit."

"That is evident," said Lilla dryly. "I wish you would act on your kind belief that I am not a fool. You have a claim, I know, to offer advice, but as to my ultimate action I must say that I will be my own judge."

"This sounds very fine. Don't you think that your 'ultimate action' may ultimately succumb to the necessities of the case? To state it plainly, as

I have to do with you, — for you will not of yourself recognize one of these considerations, — I am now paying for your food and shelter and even give you pocket-money. While you are thus in my debt, you go down-town and order two or three expensive dresses at fashionable shops under the plea that they are your own bills. To this my answer is simple. I consider it wrong to incur bills you have no means of paying within a reasonable time, and I do not consent to be the means of your doing so."

"Very well," said Lilla lightly; "in this case the deed is done, and as the dinner-bell is now ringing we must defer till later further lamentations over spilt milk."

"The deed is not done," said Mrs. Miller sternly. "The dresses must go back where they came from."

Lilla laughed scornfully.

"Such people never take back a dress. I owe them the money, and they will claim it."

"Possibly if I explained to them the value of their claim, they would make an exception."

Lilla reddened with anger, but said nothing. Mrs. Miller saw that her words had told at last, and congratulated herself that she had the power to call a halt in her cousin's wild extravagance.

"Come," she added cheerfully, "we have said enough for this time, and I ask your pardon for making you come into this hot kitchen, but it seemed as if I must speak my mind. Won't you go up to dinner now?"

"I must go to my room first," said Lilla, turning away.

"Poor child," said Mrs. Miller to herself; "it is, of course, very humiliating for her. I wish I could do differently."

Mrs. Miller would have been still sorrier for her cousin, had she known the contents of Willcox's letter, which Lilla carried to her room to read. It ran: —

"I hope you have not felt my delay half as much as I have myself. There have been many set-backs in the settlement of the New Hampshire property, and on that depended my ability to help you with any considerable sum.

"I cannot deny that there are many uses to which the sum now at my disposal could be put, and it is possible, too, that your circumstances may now be easier than when you spoke to me. So I have adopted my wife's suggestion that if you are still in need of a loan, you should call on her and discuss the amount. I think you two ladies would soon understand each other.

"It is all the pleasanter to me to leave this affair to my wife, as some half-promises of mine to her are at stake, and it would be much more pleasant for her than for me to sacrifice a few such matters, if need be, to your temporary necessities. This last remark is almost a direct quotation from her, so you will see that she shares my continued and deep interest in your welfare.

"Hoping that you will honor Mrs. Willcox with an early call, I am," etc.

Lilla's expression was peculiar as she dropped this missive. Certainly, the guileless Willcox was hereafter to be well managed.

"A thoroughly clever little cat!" she murmured to herself. "I think we two ladies understand each other without an interview."

To grasp thoroughly the conditions which dictated Willcox's letter, it may be well to go back a little and seek him out as he stood, a pleased inspector of his own house, not long after his wedding-day.

He was in his cosy sitting-room, surveying with amusement some packages which had arrived, marked in large letters with the name of the small personage recently installed over his household. He had not been so long married but that the term "Mrs. Willcox" still struck him as a delicious bit of humor. Even on a bill it seemed intended as a joke, and this view of things he was explaining to his father, a little old man with thin yellow-gray hair, who had come down from his own rooms on hearing his son's voice.

Bessie, the cause, humanly speaking, of the accessions of property which amused Willcox, and the originator, too, of the air of comfort and order which pervaded the house, — Bessie herself was still downtown, a fact which Willcox had not counted upon when he got off an hour early from the office.

He had successfully repelled his father's insinuations that Mrs. Willcox's name was possibly less attractive on a bill than elsewhere, and had launched into a general eulogy on his little wife.

"I have been mighty clever, father, now you can't deny that. It 's no small thing to know enough to appreciate her, let alone the amount of brass needed. Perhaps you think every woman has that gift of

managing and making the world run smoothly. If you do, it is because you have n't visited around as a bachelor for twenty years or less. Just look at the whole thing now," and he waved his hand comprehensively over the room; "a week ago, desolation, now, a little Paradise; and it 's our very own."

Willcox broke off suddenly, being moved at the thought of his little home. Dr. Willcox considerately turned away, and contemplated some photographs from the old masters, which had been recently hung.

"Yes, it 's very pretty, very pretty," he said. "What, for instance, might this be?"

"Oh, those are presents from Mrs. Meredith. Let me see," continued Willcox, walking over to them; "Bessie explained it all to me once. One is Saint Somebody showing his wounds to Saint Somebody else. Bessie says it 's one of her favorites, owing to the first saint's expression. I forget the exact name of the other, but you can see the Madonna and Child, and some one has just built a hospital and is handing it to them."

"Very pretty, very pretty indeed," said his father. "The pictures would kind of suit each other better, perhaps, if the hospital were only larger so that the saint could get in. How did he receive his injury, do you know?"

Willcox smiled at the professional tone of the question.

"I forget just how it was," he said thoughtfully. "He was either broken on a wheel, or thrown out of a window on to spikes."

"My conscience! I should think it would have killed him."

"Why, it did. This is afterwards."

Dr. Willcox turned a stupefied look on his son, which a ring at the door-bell prevented the latter from noticing.

"Bessie at last, I do believe," he cried, hurrying to the door.

"I will go upstairs," said his father, retiring hastily to the staircase.

"No, it's not," announced Willcox in a lower voice, as he opened the door. It proved to be a cook, who said she had an appointment with Mrs. Willcox.

"Then she will not be far behind;" and the old gentleman continued his retreat.

Bessie did arrive within a few minutes. Her husband left her to meet the cook alone in the hall. To his delight the interview was a short one, as another cook had been engaged, and when the front door closed he showed himself.

During Willcox's short experience as an accepted lover, he had learned in some measure to disguise his feelings. He was constantly schooling himself to behave reasonably, and not to forestall every desire his wife might have for his caresses. In the end such self-restraint had its reward. So now he had thought to greet her like a husband of a year's standing; but the contrast between his own size and strength and her small defenselessness was too much for him, and he had her in his arms immediately. There was no reproach, however, in the blue eyes

lifted to his, — instead, a straightforward seriousness very dear to him, and he passed with her into their sitting-room, wondering that he could be so happy regularly every day.

Bessie did not ask, as Willcox supposed she would, to have the packages opened immediately, but, having looked them over she sat down, and took off her hat, while she said softly: —

"You seem to forget, dear, that we had a quarrel this morning."

"*We* have a quarrel! That is impossible. It is true," continued Willcox, as Bessie began to speak, —"it is true that we had reached very different conclusions about Miss Wilton, but I am not at all sure I was right. At any rate, I would trust my little wife sooner than myself to do the kind and generous thing. But we could n't quarrel, darling. Don't use such a word."

"No one could with you, dear Jim; you are right. If I was ugly in what I said about her, it was because she has always seemed to lay a claim to your services, and I was afraid you were deceived by her selfish, spoilt-beauty way of doing things. You know you don't belong to her."

Willcox assented to this proposition; in fact, it took several minutes for him to express all his satisfaction with his present owner.

"Well, then," said Mrs. Willcox at last, a little severely. "May I ask what you propose to do about Miss Wilton's request?"

"Answer it immediately," said Willcox with a sudden inspiration. "Come, we will get it off our

minds. Where have you hidden my writing-paper? We must agree on some sum, however small, and let her know she can draw on us up to that."

"Your paper is in the drawer under your elbow," said Bessie. "How are you going to begin?"

"I shall begin 'My dear Miss Wilton.' I can hardly say less than that, I think."

Bessie boxed his ears for his impudence, and perched herself on the arm of his chair that she might see every word. It was difficult to compose a letter with her head so near his, but he at last finished a paragraph, and Bessie read it aloud.

"'I hope you have not felt my delay half as much as I have myself. There have been many set-backs in the settlement of the New Hampshire property, and on that depended my ability to help you with any considerable sum.' Very good, so far."

"Ah," said Willcox, and he again took up his pen.

"What queer *I*'*s* you make!" interjected Bessie.

"My writing is n't handsome like yours. Do you remember," continued Willcox, stopping to look at her, "the first note you ever sent me, written long ago in answer to an apology of mine?"

Bessie nodded.

Willcox looked at her eloquently for a few moments.

"I 've got that note now," he said at last. "You asked me to come and see you in your new home. I 've done so now, have n't I?"

"Look the other way, Jim," said Bessie sternly, "and go on with your letter."

Jim accordingly looked at the paper, then at her, then wrote a few lines more.

"I cannot furnish all that you may need, but if five hundred dollars would help, I might lend you that sum."

"How is that?" asked Willcox, as Bessie gazed rather rigidly at the paper. "Please say something."

"Well," said Bessie sharply, "I should prefer this;" and drawing the paper to her she wrote: —

"I have after all but a small sum to dispose of, and find myself unable to spare it at a moment when I have so many expenses to meet."

Willcox started on reading this, and gave his wife a grave, inquiring look, which she steadily returned. He did not speak, and after a moment she left the arm of his chair and took a seat on the sofa. Willcox felt keenly even this slight withdrawal, but he did not move.

"Do you remember," he said gravely, "that she is in real need?"

"Come here, dear Jim, won't you? I want to talk it over."

Willcox rose, and resisting the allurements of the sofa, took a chair near her.

"Do you *know* that she is in need?" asked Bessie.

"I know that she is in a very bad position, having borrowed money at exorbitant rates. She was hard pressed at the time, and so became involved in this ruinous arrangement. If I become her creditor for a part of the amount, it will save so much of the excessive interest, and she will the sooner be able to

pay all. I don't suppose she is in need of food and lodging, if that is what you mean."

"How can you look so solemnly at me, dear Jim, as if I were a hard-hearted woman? It 's your affair, not mine. The money is n't mine. The only question is whether or not you believe in Miss Wilton, and then whether or not such a sum is not entirely beyond your means. You feel, I suppose, that she is honest and open with you?"

"Do you doubt it?"

"I don't know her, and you do. She has impressed me as a self-seeking, worldly sort of woman, very incautious, to say the least, in her love affairs. I think, too, she might show a lack of fine feeling in her money affairs; but I may be mistaken. Her friend, Mrs. Meredith, has lent her money. I heard Miss Wilton allude to it at Newport. Is she so poor?"

"Poor? No. She has four thousand dollars a year from her father's estate."

"Four thousand dollars a year for herself alone, and you propose to lend her money! Really, Jim, it is for us to borrow, I think. I can't see that the case appeals to our charity in the least."

"Neither does it. It is a matter of accommodation."

"Will it prove to be merely that? This is where we differ, perhaps. I think she would be quick to borrow, and slow, very slow, to return."

"You may be right in that," admitted Willcox.

"She seems to me a thoroughly selfish woman."

"There I feel sure you are wrong. If you once

talked with her, you would, I am sure, see the whole question very differently. It is easy to reason away another's claim on one. To see him personally makes a different thing of it."

"You have decided, then, not to furnish the spare-chamber?"

"I thought you said my mother's things did very well there for the present."

"I am satisfied, if you are. Then there is the lighting of the dining-room and the plumbing in the front cellar, and the bricking over of the back yard."

"Of course, Bessie, if we loan a large sum of money, we must wait for some of these things."

"I do not see, I cannot see," exclaimed Bessie wildly, "why we are to suffer in health or comfort to meet Miss Wilton's bills. Very likely she has borrowed of some one else, or may by this time have made it up from her own money. Men are such fools the moment a woman has the least pretension to good looks!"

Willcox was troubled and for some time drummed silently on the table. At last he said: —

"You may be right about her no longer needing the money."

"Let her come to see me, dear Jim. We will find out between us which of us needs it the most. I suppose I may have at least an equal chance with her. You know you half promised me about the dining-room, the light is so trying. Now it would be much more graceful in me than in you to break that promise, if she still needs the money."

"You need not put on a pleading tone about that, my darling; I am only too glad if you will see her. I know it will touch you. Two women can always understand each other better with no man about."

Thereupon Willcox rewrote his note according to this plan.

"Shall I fix a day?" he asked doubtfully.

"Oh, no, that is not necessary," said Bessie, looking a little queer. "I am at home most of the time."

There had been another difference of opinion between the two, which gave Willcox much more pain than this one. He had known before his engagement that Bessie did not share his religious views, but he had never thought of her being unwilling to accompany him to church; and now she was unwilling. It was true that since their marriage she had conformed to his wishes, but it was understood to be in the nature of an experiment, and the experiment was working disastrously.

Willcox was himself strongly loyal to his church and his minister. One of the bonds that held him was the stand taken by this particular church for the cause of foreign missions. His heart had always been tender towards this branch of Christian work. A greater transfiguration of business life could scarcely be imagined than that which came to him periodically, when he saw in his moderate success and his acquaintance with men the means whereby he was part of the great movement which carried the gospel to the dark places of the earth.

It was almost cruel that at just this point he found Bessie most unsympathetic. One of her strongest prejudices (he could not think of a softer name for it) was against this very idea. They had stumbled unexpectedly upon this difference of thought, and the words unguardedly used by Bessie had given him deeper wounds than he would own even to himself. Bessie was so wonderful to him, had tastes so far above his level, that he felt sure this clashing of opinion was due chiefly to his own deficiencies; so that even while suffering the most, he withheld his thoughts from any harsh conclusion.

To Willcox's surprise, Miss Wilton did not immediately respond to his letter, either personally or by writing. On the third evening even, Bessie returned the same negative answer to her husband's inquiries. At that time Willcox was entertaining some friends who were members of his church, and he slipped in his question as they were leaving the dining-room.

Mrs. Willcox shook her head.

"She has not been here, but I have heard from her. I will tell you later;" and thereupon she looked so beaming and roguish that Willcox was lost in wonder.

He was very proud that night of his wife. Not before since his marriage had he had such occasion to admire her social gifts, and indeed he had never before seen her presiding at a dinner-company.

When they were left alone,— his father had retired early, — he inquired how she liked his friends, and himself rehearsed their good qualities.

Bessie laughed, and curled herself up in an easy-chair.

"They are very charming, and I am very glad they are gone. Will that do?"

"Then you don't like them?"

"Was n't I nice to them? Did n't they have a good time? Then why do you ask further questions? Really, Jim, I don't like them as well as I do you. You have a very important quality which they lack."

"And what is that?"

"You are not too much afraid of this universe to have a good time in it. These men would be mortally alarmed if they ever did or could enjoy themselves."

Willcox drew up a stool for himself at Bessie's feet and said mildly, —

"Is that the way to judge them? You know it is not their object in life to have a good time."

"Neither is it yours, but you have the capacity."

"I won't deny that," said Willcox, lifting his eyes rapturously to hers. "How did you ever know that I had it in me to endure such happiness?"

"Well, you see, you appreciated *me*."

"You were right there, you wise little goddess."

"Well, Jim, I am wiser than you really think, in spite of your flowery phrases. You thought I was wrong the other day about Miss Wilton. As a bachelor you could afford, perhaps, to play the great blundering Don Quixote, but I must say that I am just as well content that my husband should not contribute half a thousand dollars towards another wo-

man's — well, what do you think your money would have gone for?"

"What?"

"Now I will tell you all about it. I went to see Mrs. Miller this morning about my second girl. I wanted to learn a little more about her history. Mrs. Miller was expected from the country, where she had been for two days. So I went to the top of the house to see Sallie. Sallie told me that Miss Wilton had left the day before with all her belongings except one, and that was her maid, who had consequently been in tears ever since. The reason of this departure was, so Sallie thought, because Mrs. Miller had refused to pay for some dresses Miss Wilton had ordered. Sallie saw the dresses as they were packed, and says they must have cost several hundred dollars. So you see, dear Jim, you might have had the pleasure of paying for some very charming toilets, if your wife had not been so fearfully selfish about it.

"But this was n't all. I had been in Sallie's room about a half hour or so when Mrs. Miller came in hurriedly, just as she had arrived from the country. She looked very much disturbed, and asked if it were true that Miss Wilton had left the house. Sallie told the story, and Mrs. Miller asked what was in the boxes left for the dressmaker to send for.

"'They are empty,' said Sallie. 'She took the dresses with her.'

"I have never before seen Mrs. Miller so much upset. She went downstairs, and when I followed

later, she was talking to Elsa in her office, and one of them was crying; possibly both were."

"But where has Miss Wilton gone?"

"To another boarding-house, smaller, and much more expensive. That was why she left her maid behind. She could not afford to pay her board. Now, Jim, is n't it just as well I did n't consent to this little loan?"

"Why, you did consent to all I asked. You promised to arrange it with her personally."

"Yes, to be sure; of course," said Bessie. "That is true."

Then the impulse to candor became too much for her.

"Only she never would have asked me for it, never in the world."

"Why not?" asked the astonished Jim.

"Because she would n't. She would n't try to fool me, you know, as she would a man. And now," cried Bessie, leaping to her feet and dancing about, — "now we can have the dining-room and the cellar both set to rights. You can't possibly say you have n't the money."

Lilla had, indeed, quitted her cousin's house, and Elsa had been left behind. In vain had the poor girl protested that she wished no wages till Miss Wilton should be quite able to pay them. The latter had given her to understand that she could not now afford a maid's board. It was no pleasant outlook for herself, she said, to do without a maid, but the sacrifice was unavoidable.

Elsa, who was daily a witness of Miss Wilton's

extravagance, and who had reason to think herself well-nigh a necessity after these years of service, — Elsa could not be satisfied with this pretext, but tried herself to discover which of her many offenses had been sufficient to make Miss Wilton forgetful of her own convenience.

When Miss Wilton, fresh from her altercation with Mrs. Miller, had announced briefly her determination to be free from her cousin's tyranny, Elsa in the warmth of her feeling had spoken very frank words. She had even, contrary to all precedent, alluded to Miss Wilton's pecuniary position, a freedom which she thought justified by circumstances. This was probably the unpardonable offense, unless her unfortunate suspicion of the day before had already sealed her fate. On neither occasion had Miss Wilton shown any anger, or indeed made any answer. Elsa had no intimation of her approaching dismissal till everything, even her own trunk, was ready for the move. Then a few unmoved words conveyed the blow.

When, after days of tears, Elsa was able to reflect thus reasonably, she found some consolation. She had, indeed, roused against herself Miss Wilton's strongest feelings of personal dignity. There was something to forgive, and she could acknowledge it. Repentance and time might be of avail. Miss Wilton would sorely feel the need of her, and on some favorable day would forgive her and take her back.

This hope she explained to Mrs. Miller, touching the latter's soft heart. It was not many days, how-

ever, before Mrs. Miller found the following note on her office desk: —

I have gone away for good. I think my heart is broken. Miss Wilton has engaged some one else.

ELSA.

Mrs. Miller's face grew very dark as she sat for a long time thinking over the whole matter.

"Perhaps, after all, I was not too severe with her," she said to herself. "The Wilton blood is strong in her. I never thought her father had much heart. God forgive me, but I think she has none at all."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE time had come when the Vanderzees as a family were to return to New York from their summer wanderings. Miss Vanderzee and her younger sister, Belle, had left their brother alone in the city, while they paid a long-promised visit to Buffalo. Now they had come home in time to prepare the house for their elders, — their father, mother, and invalid aunt.

The older sister was really sole manager; Belle was of very little service in these humdrum arrangements. This morning, while Clara was preoccupied at her desk, Belle was soliloquizing with many sighs from the depths of a large armchair.

"It 's sad to have our good times over so soon. Mother comes home to-morrow, and we might as well be royal princesses for all the fun we shall have now. Why is it, Clara, that it is only in fairy-land that princesses lead a happy life?"

"Don't know, I 'm sure," murmured Clara absent-mindedly.

"Freedom, blessed freedom," exclaimed Belle, suddenly apostrophizing the mantelpiece; "thou goddess who art fled from the abodes of wealth and power and now inhabitest only the dunghill and the tent of the outcast gypsy! — um, — now hold on a moment till I start again!"

"A most curious apostrophe!" remarked Clara. "'Freedom, blessed freedom, hold on a moment till I start again!'"

"Say, thou fell tyrant, called Public Opinion," pursued Belle, ignoring her sister's interruption and gesticulating fervently, "to whom every American is an unquestioned slave, at what point of the social scale is a man rich enough or poor enough, famous enough or obscure enough, to act as he feels and to love whom he chooses. Bound as I am hand and foot, I here insult thee to thy face. The day of liberation will dawn at last even on this benighted land. Some American girl, perhaps, — a Maid of *New* Orleans (or more probably of New York), — will carry our oriflamme and, heading a great society revolt, be enrolled as our first martyr."

"Well," said Clara a little scornfully, "I like this from you. You are usually fond enough of your slavery, as you call it. What are your present hardships?"

"Oh, no worse ones than the starling's, or those of a prisoner in the Bastile; I can't get out. And the simple fact, Clara, that you laugh and that I laugh shows that our deliverance is as yet in the far future. Don't you see that we can't have our nice little dinners any more? What would mother say to Jeffreys, do you suppose, or to Harold Courtney? Then those lovely men we have been dancing with at Buffalo! Every one of them has vowed to call on us here, if he had to beg his way on foot; but when they do come, they will drop off like untimely apple-blossoms under the chill of Knickerbocker

courtesy. I have seen it done several times too often."

Clara Vanderzee frowned a little at her sister's freedom of speech, and not till she had written a note and stamped it did she speak again.

"I think father will like Mr. Gardiner. I mean to bring them together."

"I can't imagine it. Why not begin with Miss Wilton?"

Miss Vanderzee laughed cynically and cast a pitying look towards her sister, which caused the latter to add apologetically, —

"Well, how should I know?"

Clara explained herself somewhat dogmatically.

"Jeffreys' ability counts for something everywhere. He is very successful for so young a man. He started with nothing, and is worth at least a million already. He knows, too, how to take care of money. Lilla — well, Lilla has her good looks, and that is absolutely all. She has not even style, which is worth more than looks. As Mrs. Gardiner, we may some day hear more of her, otherwise not, most probably."

"Dear Jeffreys came here last night," said Belle, tacitly giving up her point. "I believe I didn't tell you, did I? I don't believe Miss Wilton treats him decently. He hardly mentioned her."

"I 've no patience with her," said Clara sharply. "I can see just how it is. Jeffreys has fallen into the vein of being too much in earnest. He is always dancing attendance at home and abroad, and thinks himself hopelessly in love. She is foolish enough to

take it all as food for her vanity; I used to give her credit for a little common sense."

"Yes," said Belle sorrowfully. "I told Jeffreys last night that he had much better spend the time on me. He is wasting it now."

"It 's about time for your parents to return, young woman. Your social reforms are very striking, to say the least."

It was after this conversation that Belle determined to call on Miss Wilton and see what Gardiner's chances might be. Fearing that Clara might disapprove, she did not confide in her, but started alone early in the morning of the day her parents were to return. Early as she was, she was not Miss Wilton's first caller.

Lilla was thoroughly enjoying her new surroundings. She often breakfasted in her private sitting-room, her coffee and eggs being brought to her directly from the kitchen by Elsa's successor. Her dinner she took with a few others downstairs.

It was hard now to understand how her departure from Mrs. Miller's homely, almost shabby boarding-house had given such a wrench to her feelings. The day had been rainy. Mrs. Miller was absent in the country. The scene of parting with Elsa, though short, necessarily reacted on her most disagreeably. She really felt some affection for the home she was leaving. It had been more like a home than any place she had lived in for years; and after her excitement, both of anger with Mrs. Miller and resolve as to her own action, had somewhat subsided, she was dismayed to find her spirits sinking rapidly and continuously.

One's physical surroundings, the house one lives in, even the aspect of a single room, all have a wonderful power over one's thoughts. How appalling at times seems the emptiness, the lack of suggestion of any but physical needs confronting one, as one is sheltered for a single night, a stranger in a strange city! The blankness of the place invades the very soul. Gone are all the defenses of small customs and occupations, the protecting web we have woven to shut us in from the immense universe. The invasion is a painful one, but by it the imagination is often set free, our thoughts escape from their long-worn channels, and we judge of our lives as strangers and sojourners upon the earth.

To Lilla's eyes the house in which she had lived so happily already wore the aspect of a past dream. It was frightful that her half hour of waiting for the carriage had to be spent in the little reception-room. Neither Sallie Miller nor Mrs. Willcox, discussing on the following day her willful act, dreamed how weak her will became under the influence of its associations. It was to this place that Arnold would return, if he ever did return. Had she seen another path open, she could not have kept to her purpose. It seemed to her that even now, had Mrs. Miller unexpectedly appeared, she would have begged like a repentant child to be forgiven and taken home again. Her action would doubtless have been far different, for when poor Elsa came with bag and bundle, not daring to lift her swollen eyes as she performed the usual services for the last time, Miss Wilton found it easy to steel herself against the pitiful sight. A

few minutes of hard-heartedness, and she would be free from a service which was now little better than intrusion and unspoken criticism.

The change proved very satisfactory. The arrangements in her new home, being more like those of a private house, were far more in accord with her tastes. Never again, she thought, would she let herself so dread a change simply because it was a change. She would trust more to her luck; the new often proved better than the old.

Her change of abode had not, of course, freed her from the pursuit of her creditors, though she had allowed herself the pleasure of foiling them temporarily by leaving no address at Mrs. Miller's. Her larger bills, with the two loans she had contracted, placed her in debt for a year's income; this was an improvement over what her condition had been when she returned from Newport. Just now, indeed, her daily expenses were vexatiously large, especially as she had found it impossible with her present habits to get along without a maid; but she had a feeling, without being conscious of its full significance, that that money was not ill-spent which made her relations pleasanter with the Vanderzees and with Mr. Gardiner.

Miss Wilton had inherited from her father a love of gems and jewelers' work, and had, while in Europe, picked up a fair amount of knowledge in that direction. It was not surprising that this taste freely indulged in New York should have added heavily to her expenses. Since leaving Mrs. Miller's she had discovered a treasure, an old bracelet

in filigree-work, and by judiciously timing her visit to the jeweler's when the more experienced partner was out, she had succeeded in buying it for the inexpensive equivalent of having its price added to the bill on which she at intervals paid small installments. Before this unpaid account had interfered, she had been on very good terms with this older partner, as he was not slow to recognize her taste in precious stones. Now, she thought, he would laugh, even though vexed, when he found that she had so cleverly robbed him of his new acquisition.

It was indeed exasperating that while this large bill had been a year and a half at least unpaid, the dressmaking establishment should give themselves so much trouble over a few hundred dollars, now due scarcely a month. It was the representative of this creditor who was ahead of Belle Vanderzee in waiting on Miss Wilton this October morning.

The absurdity of the demand was to Lilla the striking feature of it, and with her imposing manner of speech she usually made others understand to the full the view she took. Nevertheless, this young clerk, though of meek and retiring manners, was persistent in refusing to go. Perhaps he had learned by experience that to yield to his native kindliness meant simply future weariness to his legs; and that, though a woman might talk him out of all countenance, she could not really put him out of the house. In the faith, at least, that she could not, he was stubbornly holding out, long after his demands had been laughed to scorn.

"I was told," he said mildly, "to bring back the money with me."

Lilla sat and looked at him in despair. She had convinced herself, if not him, a half a dozen times of the impertinence of his demands, and had visited upon him the bolts of her indignation, and still he repeated the same mild remark. At last she condescended to persuasion.

"You know you might stand and say that all day, and I should be none the better able to give you the money. Now I 'll tell you what to do. I expect some money to-morrow or next day. Bring this bill back day after to-morrow, say about half past five or six, and if I have the money, I will pay you. Well, I *shall* have it; there 's no doubt about that. There 's the door-bell now. I can't give you a moment more."

Lilla with this left him abruptly and ran upstairs to her sitting-room, where in a few moments she was joined by Belle Vanderzee.

"How sweet of you to come, dear!" exclaimed Lilla after embracing her warmly. "You can spend the morning with me, I hope. It is an age since we have had a talk. Excuse me a moment. I must tell the girl that I am engaged."

When Lilla returned, she looked well-pleased. The clerk had at last gone off.

"Ah, do lay off your hat," she said. "Calls are so unsatisfactory nowadays, — so short."

Belle complied. She was unusually silent, wondering how she could best speak a word for poor Jeffreys. At that very moment a letter from him lay in Miss Wilton's desk, which would have shed much light on the matter, and might, indeed, have

prevented her from interfering at all. After confirming an engagement for that afternoon, Gardiner wrote as follows: —

"You cannot know what last evening was to me after the disgrace and hopelessness of the past week. Just for that evening by itself I must be unconditionally grateful. I cannot even now imagine how you did it; how you could possibly and so easily keep back from a man's tongue a love so desperate as mine. Yet I never could have myself invented a draught so intoxicating as you were to me last night.

"What did you mean by it? What do you mean by anything? I cannot tell. You are incomprehensible.

"I must say one thing, however, and you know I have always done you the honor of being quite frank with you, even so far as to confess that I had forgotten you, at a time when I supposed that was a possible act. I must warn you that I am not a man to be indefinitely held in hand. You may laugh if you will, when I say that I cannot fix any day as the limit of my patience. It is none the less true that I can at any moment and will, when the right moment comes, forswear the sight of you forevermore.

"See how I rage and threaten, to my own great detriment, perhaps, when you are so wonderfully gracious as to promise me an hour this afternoon. I do appreciate it.

"How much greater is the reality than all the wild dreams and ideals of a young man's heart!

How faint are the charms of the heroine of any tale or idyl in the light of your eyes! The whole mystery of life is hidden in those eyes, — the sadness, the self-contradictions, and the magnificent personal will that dares to take its pleasure in the midst of forces unknown, blind, and irresistible. Now that I have tasted reality, I cannot put up with my own ideas, not even with my ideas of you. It is waste time when I am not with you.

"I could do anything you wished, or be anything. If ever I tell you stoutly what I shall do or think, you may know that five minutes in your presence will reduce that determination to soft clay, to be moulded at your pleasure.

"I am as frank and as foolish as a boy of twenty, — as endless too. Real love must be frank, I think. It will not be disguised, even for its own advantage. A man must risk himself, hoping that the woman of his love may prove to be diviner than himself, and lead him in ways that are higher than his ways; hoping the miraculous, no doubt, and confessing that he has no claim whatever to heavenly interposition."

How this letter would have impressed Belle Vanderzee, it is difficult to say; perhaps only favorably, as it was Jeffreys' composition, and Jeffreys just then was a court favorite. She had laid aside her wraps, and was sitting with her arms lazily clasped behind her head and her eyes fixed innocently on Miss Wilton as she asked: —

"Have you seen Mr. Gardiner lately?"

"Yes, he called last night."

"Well, that is lately. Then you have more recent news than I."

"Has he any news? He did not tell me any."

"No, I don't mean that he has anything to tell, only I watch him a good deal. You know I 'm very fond of Jeffreys. He used to look very forlorn, and I pitied him; but I think you have really been a consolation to him. He 's looking much better than he did last spring."

"Then my summer has not been lived in vain."

"Oh, you know what I mean, Miss Wilton; I am always bungling matters. Society is good for him. It helps him to forget. And he always likes to be with you, so much so that — well, I mean, in short, I thought at one time he was forgetting altogether too fast, if you will excuse me for saying so. One does like a man to have a little memory. But day before yesterday I saw him, and he was back in his old dumps. It really did me good to see him there for an hour or two."

"I suppose you are referring to some unfortunate love affair of his."

"Why, his engagement! Did n't you know of that? Now am I betraying state secrets? I thought Clara had told you."

Miss Wilton shook her head with a smile. Belle continued.

"Perhaps I ought not to call it an engagement. I don't suppose it ever got as far as that. You know, Jeffreys would naturally marry a girl with a lot of money — in a nice way, don't you know? It would come natural to him to like such a girl, and

he would know how to manage any amount of property. Well, this was a Miss Rollins, and she — now I know it is n't pleasant to refer to social position, and that sort of thing, but that 's what I mean. She has it, and a man naturally likes a touch of that too. This was at the time that Jeffreys' railroad was in a doubtful condition. Of course, I have to guess at things, but I suppose they thought he was going to make a failure of it, for he put an end to his visits very suddenly and was fearfully blue about it. Clara says he did n't care for her much, only for her money, and to have his own way, for Jeffreys always wants that. But I think better of him, and when I saw him so blue the other day I knew that I was right; for I heard last week in a private way, and it must have just come to his ears, that Miss Rollins has become engaged to some one else. I think it is very nice of him to care, after they have treated him so abominably, only I hope he won't carry it too far. Did he seem much depressed last night?"

"It did not occur to me; but then I had no suspicions and might not notice."

"No, of course you would n't. I saw it in a moment. That wretched Miss Rollins! He 'll marry some one ten times as rich as she, you see if he won't, and with a pedigree to beat everything. Miss Rollins bit her own nose off; she 'll discover that some day."

Lilla laughed a little uneasily.

"Ten times as rich! What wealth that must be!"

"Well, you wait and see, that 's all."

Belle did not damage the effect of all this by fur-

ther eulogies. She passed to other subjects, and Lilla's new dresses were brought out for her approval. Just after she had taken her leave, and the door was closed behind her, it opened again enough for her to say through the crack without being seen: —

"Don't tell Clara that I told you, for she never would believe but what I had made an awful fool of myself, and I know I have n't."

A question as to Belle's good faith crossed Miss Wilton's mind as she was left alone, but it was soon dismissed, and she was left to contemplate herself in a new light, as one wholly unequal in position or fortune to the lover who seemed so humble and beseeching. The effect was not just what Belle had anticipated. Lilla was not as well drilled as were the Vanderzees to reduce all her thoughts to money standards. The idea that with any fortune, large or small, or even overloaded with debt, she would not confer honor by marrying any man she had ever met (except possibly one man) was something she could not endure. Her pride was stimulated rather than lessened by Belle's subtly-contrived suggestions, which had the greater weight because of the meagreness of her own knowledge of Gardiner, outside of what he himself confided to her. This feeling grew as the day wore on, and came near making her refuse the promised interview, when his card was brought up at the appointed hour.

Though Lilla was thus filled with the spirit of independence and personal pride, in her actions she obeyed a law of which she was less conscious; and, as if her object were to please, had arrayed herself

in one of those seductive toilets of which her stern cousin would have deprived her. The thought of Mrs. Miller added, perhaps, another charm to the picture before her, as she surveyed herself in the glass, wondering how the French could so wonderfully combine gold and white, and whether her hair could not be said to catch a golden tinge from the juxtaposition. The gleam of her new bracelet had also amusing associations.

Though apparently ready before the hour, the polishing of her nails proved a delicate affair, and forced her to keep Gardiner waiting. Lilla's hands were not small; on the contrary, they were of a fair size and firm and strong. Her fingers were shapely, and the nails so clear and rosy that they fully repaid her care.

At length, when she could find nothing further to serve as pretext for delay, she entered her sitting-room with a touch of that careless, imperious self-possession which at Newport had so vexed the soul of Mrs. Meredith's little governess.

"You are as good as your word," said Gardiner, letting drop the hand she very amicably offered him. His face brightened as he spoke, for he thought he might accept as a good omen the perfection of her dress; as if a woman like Miss Wilton could ever adopt the opposite, suicidal method of discouraging a lover.

"Because I am at home when I promised to be?" returned Lilla pleasantly. "I have many virtues of that calibre."

She sat down, but Jeffreys for a few moments de-

layed to follow her example. He had come prepared to meet her idle, evasive fooling, for such it was, by a man's decision; to speak plain words and demand his answer; and to this end he had thought to remain standing, the better to express himself. After a few minutes in her presence, he felt reproved for the rude, business-like wooing he had proposed to himself. Her look, so soft and significant, invited him to a more wonderful kind of courtship, and he at last silently took a chair, without reflecting how many times in this very way had his words been charmed away from him.

For some time Lilla talked on amusingly enough, Gardiner watching her with complete satisfaction in her presence, that one relief to the unrest of a lover's thoughts; beauty that enters by the eye sometimes bringing with it a marvelous comfort and quietness. Besides, were not all the minutes as they passed being scored, so to speak, in his favor? What though she were silencing him with a magic potion, was he not drinking it directly from her wonderful eyes? Was not his unspoken passion recognized in her every movement and tone? Not by a sign or a word, indeed, — she wore yet the thick veil of a maiden's hypocrisy, — but insensibly, inevitably, by the softened voice and the half-conscious gesture.

Whether or not Miss Wilton recognized his advantage could not be determined, but she at last rose and moved to the table which stood in the bay-window. Now that she had gone away, it seemed to him that he had been on the point of speaking. A new hardihood took possession of him; a fatal hard-

ihood, perhaps, but it was now too late for further reflection.

"You received my letter, I suppose," he asked, standing near the chair she had left.

Lilla hesitated.

"Yes, I received it. Was n't it a rather sentimental letter?"

"You call it sentimental, I suppose," said Gardiner in a low, significant voice, "to wear so openly the fetters of a woman's beauty."

The first uttered words of his love — for hitherto he had been silent in her presence — could not but impress Lilla, but she replied with affected carelessness, turning towards the window: —

"We will suppose you could not help that. The sentiment was there besides. It is a trick of writing, I suppose. You could not stand up and say such things as you wrote."

"But which are the most real, the thoughts a man can force to the end of his tongue, or the hidden things that can hardly be lured out on the impersonal paper, because that must soon be at the mercy of a woman's eyes? Sentiment!" repeated Gardiner after a pause, a look of trouble coming into his eyes; "do you mean by that all that is over and above mere admiration? There is a better name for it than sentiment. Have you nothing in you to suggest what that is?"

Lilla turned on him, smiling. They had often in times past exchanged direct glances of mutual comprehension, for since their first meeting each had liked the other. Lilla seemed now to appeal to this

sympathy from his present severity, but he would not smile. He went on: —

"I wonder if you really understand me. I suppose I am a cursed fool, but I care. I want you to love me."

The request sounded strangely in his own ears as he made it. Many a man had surely asked for this at the hands of a woman, yet now something in Lilla's manner turned his words to absurdity as they were uttered. In the silence that followed, he could hear the sound of her fingers drumming against the window. He continued, however, with forced courage.

"Is n't that a possible thing?"

Lilla moved slightly, and seemed about to speak, but no answer followed.

"I have manhood enough left to leave you, if it comes to that. Thank God, I can trust myself so far. But I must have an answer. I must."

Still there was silence.

"I am to go, then, I suppose."

"Yes," said Lilla turning abruptly, "if you must have an answer at once, that is the only one there is."

There were tears in her eyes, but her voice was very cold and non-committal, and she stood as if waiting for him to fulfill his resolution and leave at once.

Jeffreys stood looking at her. The tears, unexplained and mysterious, held him fast. He answered gently: —

"I certainly will not let any self-will or proud

words of mine stand in the way of the greatest happiness this world could give me. If I do leave you, it will be with my love last on my lips, for I am bound hand and foot with love beyond all power to help myself. Whether it is weakness or strength to have it so, I hardly know. If you would take this love as worth something, it would not fail you; if not, it is not worth anything, but simply repeats the old pitiable tale of a man bereft of all purpose and courage under the power of a woman's eyes. The first only would I trouble you with; the other I owe it to you to take out of your sight."

"I don't insist on that," said Lilla with an odd smile.

The hot blood leaped into Gardiner's face.

"You are willing to let me worship you?"

Lilla raised her eyes. In their light the miracle of his happiness seemed to draw near to him.

"Perhaps that," she said. "You are so grim and dismal about it. I was never made for a tragic character."

"I am a fool," cried Jeffreys rapturously. "Of course it vexes you to be dealt with so solemnly. I don't take the part well at all. But it is deadly torture to me to be kept in doubt. Happiness is so near; it must be nearer. I don't speak of unearthly, superhuman happiness, — neither of us, luckily, has much capacity for that, — but the best of earthly happiness. You know what it would be like. Ah, darling, will you not?"

"It might have been," said Lilla regretfully; "but your engagement to another woman" —

"My engagement!" cried Jeffreys, astonished.

"Your attachment, I should have said; it is not always the same thing, I know. Indeed, I hear that Miss Rollins is engaged to some one else."

"You must be doing this simply for your own amusement. If you know anything, you know your own honors in that contest."

"Contest," repeated Miss Wilton, turning her head attentively. "I don't quite understand, perhaps."

"Ah, I wish you could taste the flattery which a sight of my heart in that matter would give you. The facts do not sound well to begin with, for I did try to win a woman's hand without the least atom of love for her in my heart. I thought we should do as well as the average couple; I would have done my part most loyally. It is sacrilege to think now of such a marriage, but how could I know better then?"

"Still," said Lilla slowly, "even at that time you had already" —

"I had, indeed, you loveliest of women. I know it now. You sent me away, you remember; rather cruelly, if I may say so; and I thought it was over with. After I had seen you again, — it was on the street one day; I have never told you about it, — I gave up every thought of this other matter."

"*You* gave it up? You mean after she did."

"Who has been maligning me?" cried Jeffreys. "You will not tell? No, by my honor as a gentleman. I cannot tell what success I might have had, for till then I had been dumb and, very probably,

discouraged; but after seeing you I never went there again. I fought hard, too, before I would write you that letter. I — these are terrible secrets — I followed you to church one day. After that I knew myself. I wrote my letter, and I came to see you. Then came the beginning, I think. It has been so different since."

Lilla had sat down during this explanation, and she now said with some difficulty: —

"You know so little about me, my debts, my self-will, my unconventional ways. You may even think that I — have money."

"You have a right to that last stab, since you know my purposes of last spring. Now, thank God, I am happier than that. I love you, I worship you. I could almost wish you in disgrace and distress that I might lift you out."

Gardiner might well suppose that he was nearing the end of his labors, but as he stopped speaking, and saw that she was pale and silent, and wore a look almost of misery, his patient love was for a moment overmastered by sudden jealousy.

"There is something hidden here," he said sharply. "The other day you told me you did not love me. You love some one else."

"Indeed I do not," cried Lilla piteously. "I hate every one but you. The world has not treated me very kindly, and I think I have forgotten how to be happy."

Jeffreys stood for a few minutes in thoughtful silence. He had often pitied her homelessness, and his heart was touched again at her words. She

needed just the rest his love would give her, and yet for some reason she dared not put out her hand and take it. By what sort of self-mastery could he hope to control her also? At last he said: —

"I am afraid nothing in the world is so selfish as a lover. He worships the state of his own heart, but for the woman he loves has no compassion. Any outsider would understand her better and pity her more.

"Still, I can't think you would be happy to have me leave you altogether — even " — Jeffreys brought out the words with difficulty — "though you do not love me. Poor little girl, you have been alone so long. Now I am going to ask you " — he made a renewed effort over himself — "to cross this Rubicon and call yourself engaged to me. It shall be a long engagement if you wish it, and I shall ask nothing of you. Keep yourself at what distance you please; a man can be taught unselfishness. Only let me feel that you have accepted my love and are resting in it. I think you will be surprised to find what comfort there is in having the matter settled, and by and by you will know how to act next."

While saying this Jeffreys had stood with his eyes turned self-denyingly away, and did not see the flash of gratified triumph which passed over Lilla's face at this submissive and one-sided proposition. When he did look at her face, he was encouraged to go on.

"If there were any roses here, I should ask for one. Not that I wish you to disavow your former hard-heartedness, but it would be the sign of a new order of things. As there are none here," — he hes-

itated a moment, — "I see a little ring on the finger which should be free for my offerings. Let that stand for your consent. Now, may I have it?"

Without speaking, Lilla held out her hand to him, and such was the loveliness of the act accompanied with the lifting of her soft eyes to his that Gardiner might well be excused for seeing in it a disavowal of many of her ungracious words. By a gesture, he asked that she herself should take off the ring, and having it he did not even kiss the hand that pledged so much, but, to Lilla's evident satisfaction, took a chair by her side and began unforbidden on the tale which had so long been held in check.

The October twilight was creeping on, and as the time drew near for Gardiner to leave, Lilla seemed very unwilling to say farewell.

"You will come early to-morrow?" she asked, again lifting her eyes to his.

"Not this evening, then," said Jeffreys, who had had a faint hope that he might be asked to dine with her where they were.

"No, not this evening."

"If I see the Vanderzees, may I tell them?"

The question was important to him, for he had begun to fear that Lilla was intending nothing more than a private understanding. He was much relieved when she answered without hesitation: —

"Yes, but ask them to keep it quiet for a day or so. I must write a few letters before it comes out."

Jeffreys had risen to leave, and was reflectively stroking his mustache. It really was a matter of

some difficulty to know what he was allowed to say under these new circumstances.

"You know we can amuse ourselves now," he said tentatively. "You will find it much more convenient to be engaged. For instance, will you drive with me somewhere to-morrow and then go to the play?"

There was some self-denial in this proposition, but it reaped an immediate reward. Lilla laughed in great glee.

"It *is* nice, is n't it? When this matter is made public, we will do it. I will choose the play to-morrow."

"Then there is another thing. Would it trouble you to wear the ring usual on these occasions?"

He drew a box from his pocket, and added in an undertone, as he handed it to her: —

"Don't think I was over-confident. On the contrary, I got it when I was bluest, to cheer myself up."

Lilla was not a woman to exclaim with delight over any article of adornment, but she had had some education in the matter of diamonds, and her face showed that she understood at once the beauty of the stone before her.

"I believe I am entitled to this formality," continued Jeffreys, coolly taking up her hand. Lilla yielded it without question.

"The hand is hardly worth it," she murmured.

Gardiner passed the ring on to her third finger, and pausing a moment in this too dangerous nearness, he stooped suddenly and kissed her soft hair and neck.

Lilla started as if stabbed, and in her resentment ran from him across the room. Then, as if recollecting herself, she fell back in a chair and bent her head helplessly.

"Forgive me, my dearest; I did not mean that."

Lilla did not move, and Gardiner went on anxiously.

"I had no right, I know. I will not do it again against your will. Don't, my darling, look so helpless and pale. Oh, it was cowardly of me. It was breaking my promise. I deserve the worst you could do to me. I am a brute."

Lilla scarcely seemed to see him. She lay in her chair pale and motionless, except for a slight trembling which occasionally seized her. Jeffreys threw himself upon his knees. His troubled look gave way to one of delight and awe.

"I did not understand," he said joyously. "How could a man like me understand the sweetest, most wonderful of women! Forgive me, if you can. I will suffer seven years for your forgiveness. I see it all now. I was torturing myself because I could n't make you say you loved me. Love me! I should hate the woman that loved me. With a true woman, to let herself be loved is everything. There is nothing left to be given after that. Believe me, my darling, I am not so unworthy to love you as must just now appear. I understand now. I will go away. I will suffer anything you may choose. If I can't be wholly sorry to have done it, it is because now there is no doubt. Ah, I am too happy. You do care. You are not cold-hearted. Only you

knew better than I what it would cost to say you loved me, and some day yet you shall say it."

Lilla's eyes wandered vaguely over the impassioned speaker, but she seemed neither to see nor hear. Only when he added, "I am to go now, I suppose," she bent her head in assent.

"But you look almost ill. I can hardly leave you like this. Won't you speak a word to me?"

Lilla roused herself, and said with effort: —

"Go, that is all; go at once."

Jeffreys rose, bowed respectfully, and left the house without another word.

There was certainly enough in this strange, uncertain courtship to furnish matter for Gardiner's evening meditations, when soon after dinner he had reached the solitude of his own room. The hours passed swiftly as in his thoughts he repeated the words spoken, and drew, even from the most unfavorable, prophecies of the happiness before him. The luxury of these memories might in itself have kept him from making the visit he had proposed to himself, to announce his engagement to the Vanderzees. But there was also a second dissuading motive, an instinct, hardly more, that as yet silence was the safer course.

As the midnight church-bell sounded on his ears, he could have wished, like a younger lover, to seek the outer air and watch the windows within which his new treasure was sleeping; but besides the absurdity of this impulse in New York surroundings, the pressure of cares a younger man might not have had forced him to keep his room. He had several

letters to open, and excuses of unavoidable detention to forward to more than one address to clear the way for the morning call he had allowed himself to promise Lilla. Such are the feats to which modern chivalry is reduced, but even this prosaic service made him happy.

It was not till morning came, when the bright sunlight should have brought happier thoughts, that he found himself smitten with a certain anxiety about the coming interview. The common-sense of daylight did not return such flattering answers as evening reveries had done. He remembered with a new interpretation her look of silent wretchedness as he had left her; not a sign had she given of forgiveness, or of returning composure, much less of satisfaction. What an absurd fancy suggested itself to him that he might find she had gone, had fled from a love which she could not endure and had done her best to discourage! The thought was not one to be reasoned away, and it was agony to him.

He passed before her windows long before he could reasonably think of asking to see her. He sent himself to a distant florist's, to distract his mind by choosing flowers for her, and then had to wait till the luxurious flower-seller arrived from the country by a half past eight train. When he had bought his flowers, he found himself unable to endure the long delay of walking back, and so he found a carriage and had himself taken to her door.

"Miss Wilton," he inquired there, and added, "If I am too early, say I will return later."

It was a blessed relief. She was not only at home,

but ready to receive him. He went up as on the day before to her sitting-room, and there, with the simplicity of a little child, she came forward to meet him.

"It seems forever since I have seen you," said Jeffreys.

"It *is* frightfully long since last night."

"Did you not sleep, my darling?"

"Don't ask me. I don't know what I did. I was so much afraid you would not come early and would go off soon to business."

"My blessed angel, you miss me!"

"I cannot bear to have you away from me. It 's frightful to be alone."

"A new world, isn't it?" said Gardiner, his brown eyes shining with delight, and with ready forgetfulness of past miseries he drew her head to his shoulder.

CHAPTER XVII.

LONG after Gardiner had left on the day before, Lilla had lain motionless in her chair in the gathering darkness. The bitterness of her thoughts cast over her a stupor, from which she was unwilling to rouse herself to more conscious misery. All her lightness of spirit had left her, her pleasure in herself, and her flattered vanity. In her foolishness she had supposed she had pacified her lover and insured his loyalty without, for the present, at least, risking her maidenly independence. How was it that after passing through such an interview, reveling in his homage and delighting to humble the pride in his eyes by the softness in her own, she had yet in her sufficient loyalty to another memory to make his touch a desecration? With no feeling but elation had she seen on her finger the ring of solemn, mutual engagement; the brilliant, perhaps, dazzled her eyes. But the touch of his lips came as a mortal insult, and thrilled with electric fire the memories she had fancied dead. A name which she thought she hated came trembling to her lips, as if in it she would seek protection. Had Arnold ever uttered one word of love to her, that would have been her sure refuge. But it was he who had left her. He had not cared to save her from herself. How could she be such a mean-spirited wretch as to think again

of such a man! Alas, her heart, which she could not control, repeated his name constantly.

She was startled at last from her miserable thoughts by a flash of light. Some one was entering her dark room most unceremoniously.

"Who is it?" she demanded, then saw it was her new maid.

"Oh, excuse me, Miss. I thought you would be at dinner."

"I shall not go down to dinner."

"Very well, Miss."

The woman hesitated near the door, and Lilla was wondering if she could accept the forthcoming proposal to have something brought up, when the question proved widely different.

"If you will not need me this evening, Miss, I should like to go out."

"You can go."

The door was shut again, and Lilla sat up in her chair and buried her face in her hands. After a few minutes she roused herself with the ghost of a smile on her face. She went hastily into her bedroom and exchanged her light attire for a street-dress. From a card left long ago by Arnold's sister, she looked for the number of his house. The street she knew well, having carefully avoided it for weeks. Now she would at least pass through it. He was probably still in the mountains. If she met him, it would avail nothing. There was no hope in her, but she would go as near to him as lay in her power.

It was very dark on the street, and the air was chilly. She passed very few people, and when she

reached his street she found it wholly deserted. A few of the houses had been reopened for the winter and were lighted. From a distance she thought she saw a light in the house she was seeking. As she came nearer, she recognized the old-fashioned iron railing on the front of the house and the iron balcony on the second story. In the third story, from behind a shade, glimmered the light she had seen. The lower part of the house was closed with shutters.

Lilla paused on the opposite side of the street, leaning on a stone balustrade. The stars were bright, and the only sounds were from the distant avenue. Would it be possible for her to ring that bell? What could she say? Could she ask to see him on business? Was it not probable that the light was in his room? The servants would not sleep in the front rooms. It was late in the season for the mountains. Yet would he be in his room at half past eight in the evening? She stood till she was cold, then, crossing the street, she grasped the iron railing. Her eyes were becoming dim, and the bitter misery was strong within her. She raised her eyes to the sky.

"O God," she said, "if Thou hast any power to be merciful and to order human events, be merciful to me, and I will believe on Thee. I here call to Thee. If I go down into blackness and darkness, the fault will not lie with me. Let me see him and speak with him. It is my last chance."

After this she stood motionless, watching and listening. The light in the third story became sud-

denly faint. A gleam of hope passed over her face, and she waited more patiently. Nothing further happened, however. She waited long, occasionally moving off a little to avoid attracting the notice of a passer-by. When at last half past nine had sounded from a neighboring church, she turned deliberately and walked away.

It was not towards home that she went. After a walk of perhaps fifteen minutes she stopped before a brick house, which had in front a narrow yard paved with tiles. She rang and inquired for Mr. Willcox.

"I think he 's out, Miss," said the maid-servant cheerfully. "Please walk in, and I will ask."

The girl thereupon threw open the door of the sitting-room and announced: —

"A lady to see Mr. Willcox."

The well-known silvery voice of Bessie Willcox replied from within: —

"Say that I am very sorry, but Mr. Willcox is out. Ask the lady if she will not walk in and wait."

Lilla shook her head warningly at the servant and was turning to the door, when Bessie came forward and stopped, with an expression not wholly of pleasure. Lilla was the first to speak.

"Mr. Willcox is out, I believe," she said in a tone of quiet hopelessness. "Please tell him I was sorry not to see him. It was a matter of business, but one that must be decided to-night, so he need not trouble himself to call. Good-evening."

Mrs. Willcox was too sharp-sighted not to notice Lilla's extreme pallor and dejection.

"Will you not sit down a few moments to rest?"

Lilla shook her head.

"I am so sorry my husband should be out. He has gone, I believe," — here Bessie hesitated, — "to a prayer-meeting. He has been expecting to hear from you in answer to a letter of his. I, too, have hoped to see you."

Mrs. Willcox was schooling herself to speak with irreproachable cordiality. Lilla replied quietly: —

"I felt Mr. Willcox's kindness, though I have not needed to make use of it. Please tell him so."

Mrs. Willcox looked doubtful at this answer, which ignored completely her own kindness just expressed. As formerly in Newport, Miss Wilton's mere presence had in it something irritating. Still, she did not wish her to go away, only to catch Willcox by himself some day and get all that she wanted out of him.

"You must excuse me," she said, as Lilla again tried to pass her; "but if you wish to see Mr. Willcox in reference to money-matters, will you not let me have the pleasure of lending you what you may need? My husband has left that matter in my hands."

"I don't want money," said Lilla abruptly. "I don't want anything."

Mrs. Willcox stood aside, setting her lips together in justifiable resentment.

"Excuse my rudeness," said Lilla with an ill grace, as she opened the door.

"Mr. Willcox will probably be at home in the

course of ten minutes," remarked Bessie coldly, as if making an effort towards perfect honesty.

Miss Wilton paused.

"Ten minutes! May I not wait, then, here in the entry?"

"That is rude," said Bessie to herself. "That is positively rude, but she has n't the good breeding to know it."

Her audible answer was different.

"Be kind enough to take a seat in the sitting-room. I have business upstairs."

In the course of ten minutes, Bessie, having seen her husband from the window, came down to the sitting-room and put a log on the fire. Lilla made a point of speaking.

"Mr. Willcox may be too tired to see me at this hour. I thought of his meeting, but supposed it was out by nine o'clock."

"He went to Brooklyn to-night to a meeting there. I hear him now at the door."

Bessie went out quickly to meet her husband, and there was much low talk outside before he at last came in. He offered his hand with such evident kindness and good-will that Lilla felt like kissing it, even under the sharp eyes of his little wife. She had supposed the latter would withdraw, but, as there was no sign of this, she said gravely: —

"If it is not too late, Mr. Willcox, I should like a few private words with you."

The thunder on Bessie's brow was something terrible, but it was visible only to her husband. He thought his wife had something to say, and so waited

for her, but as she did not speak he answered mildly: —

"Of course, then, your business is not important. I should prefer not to enter on our former discussions in the absence of my wife."

"It is wholly different," said Lilla, looking pleadingly at him. Mrs. Willcox saw the look, and her face bore witness, as she left the room, that blue eyes can be other than tender and forgiving.

Willcox was somewhat bewildered that the situation bore so much significance to the feminine mind. He sat down, and waited patiently for his visitor to do the same and explain her business. Lilla was faint and hungry, and felt hardly able to make intelligible the object of her visit, if indeed she had any beyond a craving for friendship and help. As she tried to collect her thoughts, her money difficulties faded for a time from her mind.

"I once went to meetings with you, did I not?"

"Yes, I believe you did two or three times."

"Have you yet got much of what you asked for?"

Willcox stared at her in surprise. Had she come out at ten o'clock at night for a theological discussion? Lilla went on.

"One man, I remember, used to ask that this whole great city be turned from darkness and misery to the light of the gospel. I suppose he still makes the same prayer."

"It is not the work of a month or a year," said Willcox gravely.

"But do you think there is the less misery and darkness for his weekly prayers?"

"All that lies in God's will. He tells us to pray."

"Don't you think, Mr. Willcox, that God's part is an easy one in this religion? I could do it myself, I really believe. You ask Him for something. If it comes, He has answered your prayer; if not, it simply is not his will. You see the suffering and sin in a great city. You tell Him of it. Still silence. With your own pitiful human heart you go out and do what you can. You have your small harvest of souls devoutly grateful to you and ready to believe all that you do. So there is a general thanksgiving to God. You fall sick; you pray to God, and you get well. It is God who gives you health and strength. You don't get well; it is again his will. You die as soon and as painfully as others, but the illusion still holds, and you say God is calling you home. I must say it is the easiest part for God and the most heroic for poor mortals that one could well devise."

Willcox sat and gazed at her. His theology was not ready to his lips. He, as much as any man in the prayer-meeting, was given to repeating over and over joyful hopes for the conversion of great masses of men. The phrases were food and drink to him, yet certainly these hopes were seldom realized.

"If our minister were here," he said at last, "he would answer you. I shall not say the right thing, I know. Only if any man is as good as the one you describe, it must be, I think, by God's help."

"Your faith helps you. Faith has done so often in the world's history. But doesn't the Bible tell

you to give some reason for the hope that is in you? Because some people don't have it, you know."

"I know I ought to be able, Miss Wilton, but that 's where I 'm very deficient. If I understood these things as I ought, I could do much more good. Mrs. Willcox, for instance, is much more clever than I, and sees false things about much that seems true to me; and so my ignorance hides from her the real truth, which no one could deny. It 's wonderful to me to see how one thing hangs on to another and falls with it. The more we need to have a thing certain, the more uncertain it is. Mrs. Willcox has a wonderful gift for understanding why it never can be certain, but I was never trained to that critical way of thinking."

"Well, Mr. Willcox, you are very patient to talk metaphysics with me at this time of night."

Willcox ignored the change of tone and went on, as if he had at last found the right answer.

"You spoke as if we had to live what we think good lives without any help from God. You forget, I think, the whole message of the gospel. God has himself suffered for sin, and that strengthens us to do the same. God is no longer a mere hope or supposition; He stands revealed in Christ."

"Yes, I suppose that is the orthodox faith. I don't quite know about it myself. You are very kind, Mr. Willcox. I believe firmly in that, as will be evident from what I am going to say."

She paused a moment, then said with appealing earnestness: —

"At last I have come to know that I am a perfect

fool in money matters. I get in deeper and deeper. I have come to you at this late hour because I am perfectly desperate, and if I can get no help I may to-morrow commit the most ruinous follies. I wish you would take my money out of my hands and manage it for me. Can't I sign some sort of bond by which you could take possession of it as it comes to me quarterly? I will live on any little pittance you may choose to fix. I will send away my maid. I will live anywhere, except at Mrs. Miller's. If I can see you occasionally, it will be enough to keep me steady. In a year or so things must come around right, and you must then take enough to pay you for your time, and I will be forever in your debt for your great goodness."

Lilla paused again. Her voice was growing unsteady.

"I know I am asking what very few men would give, and you are such a busy man. I would do all the running about. I would come to you for weekly allowances; or at whatever times you said. I would live ever so cheaply. I would work, if you thought I had better. With your help I would keep honest and free. I can't alone."

Lilla had lost her self-control, and the tears were now flowing fast.

"If you will trust me, Mr. Willcox, if you can trust and help me, you will save me from a great misery. I have no courage alone, but if you will help me, I will take courage."

She ended in such unrestrained sobs that Willcox was fairly frightened. He did his best to soothe

her with assurances of help and friendship, but he could not help thinking how little Bessie would be pleased with the frequent visits necessary to this plan.

"This would n't happen every time," said Lilla at last, smiling through her tears. "I beg your pardon for being so foolish."

When at last she was thoroughly quiet, Willcox set to work to learn just what her difficulties were, and Lilla rehearsed a confused inventory of debts and expenses, at which her auditor grew serious. At last he said: —

"As I before told you, any help which involves expense must be arranged with the knowledge and consent of my wife. I suppose you are in straits at this moment."

"No," said Lilla. "I have enough to pay in full the dressmaker's bill, which I told you was coming again 'day after to-morrow, but I had to go to Davids for it. I thought I could get a lower rate, but I could n't. Now I don't think it 's wise to pay this all out. I should have but twenty dollars left."

"Miss Wilton, I must refuse to help you, if you think it possible to borrow at these rates. In fact, I could not help you. According to your own showing, you are paying him, or owing him, about half your income now every quarter."

"I know it 's very foolish, but I will do differently now. I will sell my dresses and my jewelry."

"That will not meet the case, unless you can get something like what you paid for them."

Lilla turned very red.

"I am afraid I must borrow to begin with, but perhaps it need n't be of you."

"Of whom, then?"

Lilla was silent.

"This is exactly the sort of question which my wife and I should consider together. With your permission I will call her. She is very clever and suggestive."

"Don't, Mr. Willcox; don't, please, trouble Mrs. Willcox. Let it be simply an arrangement between you and me. Why should you lend anything to me? If I have nothing, the money-lender can get nothing, that is all; and if he finds anything to attach, let him attach it. I will be as honest as a man, and as careful and penurious as possible. I can easily live on twenty-five dollars or say thirty dollars a week."

Willcox looked at her with an odd expression.

"I must insist that Mrs. Willcox shall be present. You don't know her kind heart. There is nothing strange about that, you have met so seldom."

Hereupon Willcox turned a deaf ear to Miss Wilton's dissuading words and left the room. He was gone nearly twenty minutes. When he returned, Bessie followed him, and sat with her sewing at a corner table. Willcox took his former seat and said kindly: —

"You must not misunderstand our long absence. Mrs. Willcox and I are one in our desire to be of service to you, but I am not a capitalist and have to look about me. Mrs. Willcox prefers not to take part in the discussion, but will be present in case

she has any suggestion to make. She proposes, too, that you should give us a rough estimate of all your indebtedness, so that we may know just where we are."

This suggestion seemed reasonable; Bessie, quietly sewing in her distant corner, gave no sign of an intention to intermeddle; nevertheless, Lilla's reply stuck in her throat. At this silence Bessie looked up with a glance of observation. Her eyes met Lilla's, and, despite the efforts on both sides, the look interchanged was one of hostility.

"It 's of no use," said Bessie to herself. "You can't be pleasant to some people. They *will* draw out your worst feelings."

For some moments the silence was complete. Lilla was making a strong effort over herself. During the time she had been left alone, her thoughts had been very busy. She had mentally composed a note to Gardiner, in which she should explain the impossibility of their engagement and her folly in endeavoring to consent to it. It was cruel to him, doubtless, but it could not be wholly unexpected. She had given him unmistakable proofs that his love was not returned, and then had been so unspeakably foolish as to trifle with serious words in the hope of thereby keeping a hold on his friendship. Undoubtedly he would not be sent away by a mere letter, but a short interview would convince him. Then her debts would be upon her. The Vanderzees would be bitter against her. She would have no friends. With Willcox's help, she would try to face a different sort of life, and perhaps more courage

and hope would come with effort, for now her resolution was the weakest sentiment that had ever claimed that name. Should she be turned from all this simply because Mrs. Willcox insisted on knowing her debts and follies? Why not simply ignore this hostile listener, since it was with a generous man she was really dealing, and the end was freedom, and possibly in time a goodness of her own, as Arnold had one of his own.

"Have you pen and paper? I will tell you all I can remember. You know I am not asking you to meet any part of this indebtedness, but you may well wish to know how far ahead I am compromised. First of all, indebtedness to Davids for two thousand dollars. You know the interest."

"Four hundred and eighty dollars a quarter," said Willcox, shaking his head.

"Then I am in debt to" — Lilla hesitated, not wishing to name Mrs. Meredith — "a friend of mine for one thousand dollars. I have never paid any interest. The expense of my rooms, you know. I believe I must give two weeks' notice."

"To what date are they paid for?" asked Willcox, who was making a beautifully written memorandum of these confessions.

"To a week ago last Saturday."

"Then there will be a bill for four weeks; one hundred and forty dollars."

"Including the maid's board," said Lilla, who had winced at his frankness in mentioning the amount.

Willcox had apparently lost sight of the serious-

ness of these figures in the enjoyment of his clerical skill, but his wife was not so phlegmatic. Her own frugal household accounts were engraven on her memory, and furnished a startling comment on the extravagance now being exposed.

"Then," continued Lilla, "there are several small bills which give me endless trouble. I owe the dressmaker and jeweler, the milliner, etc."

"The dressmaker, how much?" asked the matter-of-fact Willcox.

"It is about four hundred and twenty-five dollars. The man is coming for it day after to-morrow. The other I can't tell you exactly till I go home. That can wait perfectly well."

Here Mrs. Willcox interrupted for the first time.

"The first bill was incurred, I believe, just before you left Mrs. Miller's."

Lilla's cheek flushed, but she made no answer. Willcox looked up, surprised at her silence, and in substance repeated the question.

"This bill dates from the latter part of your stay at Mrs. Miller's?"

"It does."

"The amount of the jeweler's bill you cannot give."

"Not exactly; three or four hundred; well, I suppose it may be nearer five."

Willcox entered all the debts she could call to mind, and then ciphered away.

"You are in debt a little over a year's income. It is worse than when we talked it over at Mrs. Miller's, though I supposed your stay with her

was economical for you. How much have you on hand?"

"A little over five hundred dollars."

"And it is about nine weeks to your next remittance. Now you see, Miss Wilton, you ought to be able to live on fifteen hundred dollars a year."

He looked at his wife.

"One thousand dollars," said the latter.

"Either of us could, of course, but if we call it fifteen hundred dollars, it will leave twenty-five hundred dollars a year towards the debts, and it would take nearly two years. At one thousand dollars a year, you could pay up in a year and a half."

"I can live on one thousand dollars, and I can dispose of something at once, and pay off several hundred to Davids."

Willcox looked at her approvingly.

"Only, Mr. Willcox, I sha'n't do it, if left to myself. It 's humiliating to say so, but I can't trust myself with money. I don't know how to live on a thousand dollars a year. I want you to tell me what I can afford. I want to come to you for my money."

Willcox turned to his wife.

"Have you any suggestions, dear?"

Bessie sewed on for a few moments.

"I am not quick in these matters," she said. "Is Miss Wilton to send her creditors to you, and if so does she deposit something with you to begin with, or do you at once begin to advance money?"

"As I understand it, she deposits her whole remittance with me, whenever it falls due, and I meet

what indebtedness I can. To begin with, she might need some accommodation. Let us see how that is."

Willcox turned to Lilla, and the two, with a readiness displeasing to Bessie, went over their figures.

"Well, before the first of December she would have to have two hundred dollars from us, probably. She thinks she can raise three or four hundred on jewelry, etc. I wish we could tell her to return that last five hundred. It would save us forty dollars a month."

"It would save Miss Wilton that," corrected his wife, who added to herself that they were not one household yet. She, indeed, was so much troubled that she was very near the verge of tears. She knew her husband's usual indecisive, temporizing way of holding off from expenditure, unless, indeed, he were called upon to sign a check for some antipodal mission. To no one but Miss Wilton was he so tractable. Bessie had suspected this weakness of his before her engagement, which, perhaps, had been hastened by her indignation. Now this insatiate woman had chosen to invade their home, proposing to put herself under Willcox's charge, to come to him regularly for an allowance, being, forsooth, too innocent and childlike to be trusted with more than a few dollars at a time. Innocent and childlike indeed! Her husband was being imposed upon. What could she do to convince him of it? This uphill battle she had to fight alone, without her husband's sympathy, guided simply by her woman's instinct, which told her that something was wrong.

"I am proposing only two hundred dollars," said

Willcox, "and that need not be advanced immediately, if Miss Wilton is successful. Does that meet your approval?"

"For my personal satisfaction, I should be glad to put a few questions to Miss Wilton. She makes it very plain, however, that she wishes to deal solely with you."

Lilla looked up quickly, as if to confirm this, but was forestalled by Willcox, who said reproachfully:

"You are misinterpreting Miss Wilton's words, my dear. I know she will gladly explain anything that needs explanation."

His tone only embittered his wife. How often, too, had she reminded him not to introduce his "my dear's" and "my darling's" into general conversation! She went on: —

"We have led different lives, Miss Wilton, as you reminded me at Newport, and I am not ashamed of it. I have known the feelings of those who work for their living. I suppose it does not occur to you that the insignificant people who provide you with clothing, jewelry, and so on, do it to gain a livelihood, and that you in taking what you cannot pay for are really stealing them — from people, too, not your equals in wealth, but who, like myself not long ago, hold no insurance against penury and starvation, but must trust to their daily strength and courage, such as they may be."

Lilla was looking coldly toward her, and replied:

"I have not often dealt with tradespeople of that class."

Bessie colored to the roots of her hair, and glanced

appealingly at her husband, who laid his hand caressingly on hers. She was encouraged to proceed.

"It is fortunate, I am sure, if your creditors can afford to wait. When, however, you are proposing to borrow money of people of comparatively small means, it becomes necessary for you to accommodate yourself to their humble views of honesty and respectability. Mr. Willcox may look shocked if he pleases, but the question occurs to him as well as to every one else how you happen to be knocking about New York at all in this homeless and erratic way."

Willcox looked apprehensively towards Lilla, but she answered calmly: —

"Mr. Willcox may have forgotten, but I did once tell him all the circumstances of my coming to New York, and the reasons for my solitary life. He is one of the few to whom I have confided, an honor he has much cause to regret."

Bessie forestalled her husband, who was about to corroborate this statement, and said sharply: —

"I know as well as my husband the account you have given, but it sounds, perhaps, differently to a woman than to a man. You left your father and traveled abroad, when you were a young girl just out of boarding-school."

"I was at school abroad," corrected Lilla patiently; "that is, till my father's death. When I crossed again, it was with a family friend."

"Whom you soon left," continued Mrs. Willcox. "With a maid you traveled over Europe, and, if you had many acquaintances like the man who followed you to New York, I do not congratulate you."

Lilla looked surprised, but made no reply. Bessie smiled cynically at her silence and went on.

"Apparently your motive all this time was one natural and not blameworthy. The wish to be well married cannot be called blameworthy, though the means used may be. Whatever were your aims or methods, you were not successful abroad and came to America."

"Let me remind you," put in Lilla with no sign of irritation, "that you have yourself invented these motives. There are women with no such powerful predilection for matrimony."

"Well," said Bessie with an unpleasant smile, "you are certainly running little risk of it. We will drop motives and look at results. You have no friends of your own sex. It is always some man whom you have in your mind's eye; whether you make a cat's-paw of a poor governess to keep a secret appointment in the suburbs of Newport, or whether you leave the roof of a relative and dismiss your maid to please the whims of a new acquaintance; a man, of course, always a man, and one not without money. You remember, Jim, what you told me of T. J. Gardiner, without knowing why I asked: a man making his hundreds of thousands of dollars; 'a sharp man,' you called him; an able man, indeed, but one that would never let his ability go unpaid. Well, he 's right; a man should have some sharpness about him, and not let his money go at the first deceitful tale from man or woman. You see you have my approval, Miss Wilton. Go on. Marry this Mr. Gardiner, un-

less, indeed, he is too sharp for that. You need n't look at me in that way, Jim. If you had had the pleasure of listening to a certain Mrs. Raynor, you would not think I needed to weigh my words. I don't accuse Miss Wilton, but I prefer not to contribute toward her support."

Mrs. Willcox stopped at last. She had spoken the bitterness in her heart, disregarding absolutely her husband's signs of remonstrance, and she looked defiantly at Lilla, feeling that she had now said all that was necessary.

The latter rose, and evidently had her rejoinder to make. She was not incapable of severe retort in her own defense. Willcox would gladly have stayed the gathering storm, and have said plainly that this woman's war of words should not proceed further in his house. But while he was hesitating as to the justice of this procedure, his wife added sarcastically, —

"A valuable stone on your left hand, Miss Wilton. It 's a pity that cannot go towards your debts, but perhaps it is a gift from Mr. Gardiner."

Lilla looked at her hand in terror. She had taken off her gloves to help in the figuring, and was so well accustomed to a ring on that finger that she had forgotten that she still wore Gardiner's diamond.

Her words of recrimination died on her lips, as the importance of this moment flashed upon her. This was the time to acknowledge her engagement, if it must be done, and why fight longer a battle for no object and with no help? She sat down again as these thoughts rushed quickly through her mind.

It was the turning-point of her life, and her anger of a moment before faded from her mind. Then she said: —

"As I was thoughtless enough to wear this ring, I had better, perhaps, anticipate the announcement of my engagement to Mr. Gardiner, asking you not to speak of it till Sunday. I hope, Mr. Willcox, that when you know him personally you will learn to think better of him. In his position he must have made enemies, but he is a man of great kindness and frankness, and not as sharp in detecting my real character as Mrs. Willcox supposes. As for her sketch of my life, it is not flattering, but as just and charitable as could be expected from one absolutely ignorant of it. I thank you, Mr. Willcox, and I will say good-night."

Bessie looked on in speechless amazement as Lilla rose and took her cloak. Willcox, however, came forward and said earnestly: —

"I can understand perfectly, Miss Wilton, that a woman may need help from her friends, even though the promised bride of a rich man. You came here with some real and deep trouble, and as yet I have not helped you. According to my promise to my wife, the matter has been discussed before her. I now stand ready to help you as you ask, and will come to see you about it, if you will allow me."

"She will not now," said Bessie under her breath, and her words were immediately confirmed.

"You could not be more kind or more generous, but I cannot accept money while my character is so much in question. I shall doubtless meet my debts

in time, and Mr. Gardiner is fortunately well aware of them already. Can you get a carriage for me? I will go with you."

Lilla passed out, and Willcox, going for his hat, was followed by his wife.

"There is something we don't understand in this," she said appealingly. "It's hard to be generous when one is not dealt with openly. I know you are displeased with me, but you will discover, perhaps, that we have acted wisely after all."

"Very possibly," said Willcox, stooping to kiss her, for never yet had he admitted being displeased with his wife; "only I had a thousand times rather act foolishly."

So weary was Lilla after this long day that having found something to eat, she found no trouble in going to sleep. In the early morning she woke and then fought her battle for the last time, now, however, without hope or a practicable escape. No deceitful light gilded the future; self-repression and deception were to be her rôle.

"Other women have done it; I can," she said to herself. "To shun the worse evil is all the freedom a woman has. She may come to despise every thought and act of her husband from morning to night, but she can hide the fact, and that is all that is necessary. She must have a shelter, a life of some kind. No woman is ever very happy. Mrs. Meredith claims as much as any wife. Hers was a love-match, and her husband's praise is always on her lips. Yet she watches him with a horrible fear, and what is the fear? Why, that this partner of

her life, this other self, should fall into habits of drinking. A woman afraid that her dearest friend may, unless watched, make a beast of himself! That is worse slavery than to have a husband whose habits are nothing to you, as long as he treats you decently.

"As for this devoted lover of mine, I have been very honest. I have told him plainly that I do not love him. If he chooses to marry me, well and good. While he remains a good husband, I will be a good wife. If he makes a brute of himself, I will leave him. That I call simple justice. Some women are devoted and self-sacrificing. I am not."

Such was the best prospect for herself which the early morning hours brought to Lilla. She rose with daylight and had her coffee brought early. It was a great relief to be up. Her sitting-room was cheerful with the morning sun. The morning paper lay by her simple breakfast. She went to the window and stood sunning herself. Two kittens in the small grass-plot were rolling each other over and over. If one had money, one could have sunlight, a breakfast in private, leisure, and seclusion. She had had enough of yesterday night's wild proceedings.

"Still," she thought, "I rather astonished the little governess. She had kindly said I was in no danger of matrimony, and then discovered my engagement ring."

As she stood watching the street, she began to wonder at what hour Jeffreys would come.

"I hope I did not frighten him too much last

night with my tantrums. I am afraid I did. I hope, too, he will arrive before anybody comes to dun me. It would be awkward if my first claim on his gallantry should be protection against the sheriff. Perhaps he won't come at all."

This last thought was depressing, however ill supported by the evidence. She went to her breakfast, and then returning to the window was just in time to see Jeffreys leap from a carriage. A smile broke over her at the eagerness with which he paid the hackman and hurried to the door. In the night she had wondered if she could endure the sight of him. That question was answered.

"Mrs. Willcox is right," she said to herself. "I do like men better than women. They are more cheerful and have much more common sense. A woman is a very foolish creature."

CHAPTER XVIII.

After Miss Wilton's engagement had been made public, she discovered that Gardiner had a large circle of acquaintances.

"I hope they don't bore you," was his comment one evening. "For the life of me I don't know what to say when they all announce their benevolent intentions of calling on you. It 's downright impudence, I think; and if you like, I 'll tell them so."

"It was very pleasant to-day. I liked the two old people so much, — Mr. and Mrs. Reid."

"Oh, did they come? Mr. Reid is a good friend of mine and holds a large interest in my railroad. He 's anxious to have you at his house."

The Vanderzees were, of course, highly pleased at Gardiner's final success, and Miss Wilton's first invitation was to their house to dine, when she for the first time met the three older members of the household. The dinner was formal, elaborate, and not very gay. Lilla stayed after the other guests had left, Miss Vanderzee and her brother taking her aside. Belle was singing snatches of song at the piano, and Gardiner was talking at the other end of the room to the two older ladies. Belle soon called him to her side at the piano.

"Poor Jeffreys, safe at last! Take this stool,

and put it before the girl you love best. Miss Wilton, you will have to stand my calling him Jeffreys. I have always done so."

"She would be a dog in the manger not to allow you that name; she has no use for it herself."

"Ah-h!" was Belle's prolonged ejaculation. "These are, indeed, secrets of the prison-house."

"Which he will gain nothing by revealing," said Lilla, raising her eyes to Jeffreys' with a significant look.

Gardiner was delighted with the threat.

"I am slow to learn," he said, "that there is no court of appeal from a woman's will, when once these same prison-doors have shut one in."

"I hear you are soon to start on a round of gayety," said Clara Vanderzee, turning to Lilla.

"This week promises well indeed. Mr. Reid gives us a reception to-morrow, Thursday we go out of town, and on Saturday we are to meet you, I hope, and end the week with a good dance, — if I find that I remember how to dance."

"You danced extremely well at Mrs. Morris's, and also at Mrs. Meredith's."

This was Gardiner's tribute, and Lilla turned on him, struck by his mention of her friend.

"I had forgotten that you knew Mrs. Meredith."

"I cannot say that I do. I had friends who were there."

Lilla was somewhat preoccupied after this, until they were ready to leave. Mrs. Meredith was almost the only one of her friends whose sympathy she cared for at this time, but Mrs. Meredith was a close friend of Arnold Robertson.

The moon was out as they left the house. Lilla had caught up her long white dress, and her shoulders were warmly clad in a soft blue wrap, whose white fur trimming lay close about her neck beneath her brown hair. Jeffreys did not lose the picture, though moving forward to the carriage door.

"It 's a long affair, is n't it?" said he, stepping over her train, as he took his seat by her side.

"Yes, and too white. I am just learning that I look hideous in white."

"In a wedding-dress you would look even worse, I suppose."

"I should n't wonder."

Gardiner twisted his mustache reflectively, as if the idea were too frightful to be enlarged upon.

"They want us down at Albany," he said at last; "my parents, you know, my married sister, and so forth. There is no hurry. Some time when you feel like it. Then I must warn you to have yourself denied at the door to-morrow afternoon. Some of my railway friends feel obliged to wait upon you. Their cards will do the business quite as well."

"Cards are a very flat amusement."

"The people are flatter, I assure you, and stereotyped as well."

"You must think it strange that I have so few friends of any description to present to you."

"I 'm devoutly grateful. Of course," added Gardiner, recollecting himself, "I should be delighted to meet any one you care for, but I like to imagine that you were created freshly for me. It has

pleased me that you have no intimate friend among women. There 's often so much nonsense in such matters, and to my mind it rather spoils a woman."

Lilla made no answer to this, but said presently,

"I should like to have you meet Mrs. Meredith. I think you would like her. I don't know whether she is yet in town."

"I think she is," returned Gardiner. "I know her brother-in-law slightly; Mr. Stanton, who married Miss Goldthwait."

"Oh, I knew him well. I have acted with him, and have professed an undying affection for him before a large audience. I believe the perfidious wretch was half engaged to another at the time."

Lilla paused, but as Gardiner made no answer, she went on.

"What sort of a man is Mr. Stanton, really? Usually a useless question, I know, but perhaps now I have a better claim."

Lilla uttered her last words in a very low voice, and as this was almost her first voluntary reference to their new relation, her claim had full recognition in Jeffreys' heart. For some time he had been sitting bareheaded, turning a devout attention towards his fair neighbor. As the street lamps flashed in and out of the carriage, he had seen his ring shining on her hand, and now watched regularly for that recurring pleasure. That little glimmer had been a satisfactory antidote to her jocose allusion to Stanton. It now justified her claim to a confidence more sacred than the courtesy between man and man.

"Mr. Stanton has the feelings of a gentleman," he said, "but he has very little principle, or perhaps I should say strength of principle. I pity the woman who has married him. She must know by this time that his condition at the end of an evening depends simply on the opportunities he has had to drink, and not at all on his resolutions of keeping sober."

"But," cried Lilla, horrified, "Mr. Meredith might have found this out in time. I know his wife was watching anxiously for every indication of Mr. Stanton's habits."

Gardiner shrugged his shoulders.

"I can only suppose that in Mrs. Meredith's house the temptation was not so frequently offered. I don't know Mr. Meredith personally, but report says that he would not be quick to condemn that particular failing."

They were both silent after this till the carriage reached Miss Wilton's door. When Jeffreys had rung, he turned to Lilla, who had laid her hand impatiently on the handle of the inner door.

"Is it too late for me to be invited in?"

"I fear so," said Lilla somewhat unconcernedly.

"This, at least, I may have," said Jeffreys, raising the left hand he had been watching to his lips. "Have other men been allowed this?"

"I can't take my oath as to that," said Lilla with a bright laugh. "I have lived much abroad, you know."

"At least, they did not at the same time kiss their own rings."

"Good-night," said Lilla, as the door opened. "I am afraid you are becoming sentimental."

She stepped in, and Jeffreys had just turned away, when she came flying back in alarm and caught his arm.

"What is it?" asked Gardiner.

"Nothing," said Lilla between a laugh and a sob. "One of my friends whom you have not met. Oh, the villain! I sent him off only this afternoon, and here he is again."

Then she recovered herself and said anxiously,—

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Gardiner. Don't trouble yourself. It is a man to whom I owe money. Perhaps you will just tell him to come again to-morrow."

Jeffreys did not move.

"Wait a moment here, my darling," he said quietly. "Tell me which man this is. You told me, you remember, that two or three of your accounts were behindhand."

"This is a money-lender, to whom I have to pay one hundred and sixty dollars every month, and I would have had the money ready, only that I had to pay in full another bill, which I did not dream of paying for months yet. One can never count on what these shopkeepers will do."

"Then you have one hundred and sixty dollars to pay," said Gardiner, with a half-conscious motion towards his breast-pocket.

"*You* must not pay it," said Lilla earnestly. "I cannot possibly allow that."

"We are probably equally poverty-stricken," said

Jeffreys, smiling. "But I will at least speak to the man."

"Oh, do. They pay no attention to a woman. A woman has n't words bad enough for them, the scoundrels !"

Gardiner entered the house, and Lilla followed with a look of relief. Even with the disadvantage of a tendency to stoutness as well as baldness, her lover seemed to her at that moment absolutely handsome.

Jeffreys did not at once let fly the bolts of his indignation. He asked the man for the month's receipt and looked it over carefully. The rate and amount were both stated, but he gave no sign of surprise.

"You are the man named here?" he asked at last.

"I am," was the sullen reply. "It was a matter of accommodation for the lady, and the collection of the interest is a damned slow job, and takes more time than it 's worth."

"If you wish this lady to be present at our interview, you must be a trifle more respectful."

Gardiner said this very gravely, more as a matter of information than reproof; then he remained silent. It was not that the paper in his hand offered any difficulty to his mind; he was simply wondering if he might dare to disregard Lilla's intimation that she should accept no pecuniary help from him. A few moments of reflection led him to believe he could. He felt rather than saw that at that very moment she was surveying him with the utmost submission and respect.

It was far, indeed, from his wish to involve her

in any indebtedness which she would feel as compromising. He cared too deeply for her honor and independence to secure power for himself at such expense, but the temptation to gratify his own love by a princely generosity was too strong to be resisted. He took out his pocket-book and wrote on a card his business address.

"You know that building, I suppose," he said to the money-lender. "My name is Gardiner. I am the president of this railroad. Miss Wilton has intrusted to me the payment of this debt, and instructs me to pay it in full. Come to-morrow morning to my office with this card, and you will get your money."

Gardiner was aware that Lilla was giving signs of remonstrance, but he was careful not to look towards her, till, as she seemed on the point of speaking, he raised his eyes to hers in entreaty and deprecation. Lilla bent her head in acquiescence, and passed into the unlighted sitting-room at the left.

It was plain from the length of the interview after her withdrawal that Mr. Davids was not at all anxious to be paid in full. He expressed repeatedly his entire confidence in Miss Wilton, and his unwillingness to press any lady for the payment of a debt. Gardiner was inexorable, and perhaps allowed his contempt to be seen, for on leaving, the money-lender said with defiance, —

"The rate is not unusual, sir, when you consider the risks that are often run. Tell the lady, please, that I will always take pleasure in cashing her notes. Could I just speak with her?"

"No, you cannot," said Jeffreys shortly.

"I hope you see, sir, that my business is entirely honorable. I make it a point, sir, to gain the confidence of the ladies and gentlemen I deal with. Indeed, my natural kindness has often" —

At this point Gardiner's patience gave way, and he interrupted with some muttered ejaculation which Lilla did not catch; then the door opened and shut.

As Jeffreys entered the sitting-room, hat in hand, to take his leave, his face showed little sign of the exultation in his heart. Lilla came forward to meet him, so that the hall light shone full on her white figure. She still held the outer wrap about her bare neck and arms, and she looked at him with a timid air, which he enjoyed to the full.

"I will call at four, then, with the Stanhope phaeton. It will not tire you too much, you think, for the theatre in the evening?"

"No, it will rest me."

She looked strangely at him, as he made a light gesture of farewell and walked out of the room. He had been told once that evening that it was too late for him to stay, and that to touch even her hand with his lips was sentimental.

As he laid his hand on the handle of the outer door, he heard himself called back. Lilla had sunk down upon a small divan just within the sitting-room, where the light did not strike her.

"Did you speak?"

"I asked you to come here."

Gardiner threw down his hat and overcoat, and hurrying in, knelt by her side.

"What is it, my sovereign princess?"

"Why that title? You, rather, are the prince, — King Cophetua."

"Don't be so humble, for it does n't deceive me. You are too wise not to know which of us has conferred the favor."

Lilla had nothing to answer to this, and she felt an unusual movement of kindness towards the man who could act and speak so generously.

"The rates are horrible with these money-lenders," she said after a pause. "If you will, indeed, be so kind as to let me owe this to you and pay you the usual interest, my affairs will some day straighten themselves out."

"That shall be as you wish, and now I must leave you."

Lilla made no reply, and, instead of rising, Jeffreys bent his head till his lips touched the soft and fragrant wrap that had fallen from her shoulders. After a long silence, which proved him quite unable to carry out his own threat, Lilla said in a low but triumphant tone,—

"Have you ever left me except under compulsion?"

As she spoke, she gave her hand to him, and by a gesture invited him to a seat by her side.

"For heaven's sake, Lilla, do you do this from gratitude? You would not — you could not sully a moment like this with any such thought."

"*Will* you obey me?"

When Jeffreys had yielded, when his arms were about her, and her head on his shoulder, she answered softly in his ear: —

"If you think that a woman does such things from gratitude, you are simply an idiot."

Before Jeffreys took his leave, he had induced Lilla to talk more definitely than ever before of a date for their marriage. She at least admitted that January, though early, was within the bounds of possibility. She refused, however, to fix the day, saying that he had not yet been submitted to the approval of her friends.

To Lilla's mind, the term "friends" meant really Mrs. Meredith. She had written to her of her engagement, and at the same time to the other people who were called her friends. She had received very cordial answers. Mrs. Kelway had embraced the opportunity of reconciliation, and had paid Lilla a long visit.

"I cannot forget," she had said, "that at my house you first met Mr. Gardiner, and I must believe, too, though you, of course, will not agree with me, that I was of real service. Indeed, you can hardly imagine that the man who is now all the world to you could ever have been kept from your side by the accidents of chance. I, however, know well what little things, what trivialities of manner, especially when one is reserved like you, will divert a man's thoughts from the channel they would otherwise follow, so that I really congratulate myself on the seasonable word to him which made you so angry. It gained you his attention, and that was all you needed. Oh, I know the debt is one you will never acknowledge. I don't ask your gratitude. It is recognition enough that you have written me of

the happy issue, so that we can shake hands and be friends without further explanation. I will kiss you for that, and now, my dear, when is the wedding to be?"

In this charming and comfortable frame of mind Mrs. Kelway had remained during the entire visit, and Lilla, while guarded in word and act, and while carefully declining every invitation, had not cared to disturb unnecessarily Mrs. Kelway's equanimity.

Laura Kelway had called at another time. Mrs. Lemuel Gordon had written most kindly from Philadelphia; but Mrs. Gordon's sister, Mrs. Meredith, had not yet been heard from.

At last, to Lilla's great relief, she found Mrs. Meredith's card and a note, both lying on her desk, where the note had been written. It seemed to her that her room had gained a sweetness from the informal and friendly visit of a woman like Mrs. Meredith. Neither Mrs. Kelway nor the Vanderzees ever left that feeling behind. The letter, too, was most kind.

DEAR LILLA, — Your note was a complete surprise. Since receiving it I have been most anxious to see you, and partly because I wished that so much, I have been slow to write.

I do not remember that I have ever met Mr. Gardiner personally. My husband tells me that he is a man of great ability and is everywhere respected. I want to hear from you the better things which would not be reported in this way.

When I see you, I will tell you of some events

which have delayed our return to town. Will not you and Mr. Gardiner dine with us Wednesday at seven? This is purely informal. I shall take another opportunity of bringing your friends together to meet you.

Most cordially and affectionately,

E. G. MEREDITH.

This letter gave Lilla great pleasure. It was naturally a relief to have some hospitality on her own side with which to offset the great cordiality of Gardiner's friends. She was glad, too, the dinner was to be a quiet one, for she would be the less likely to meet Arnold. They must some day meet, but perhaps it might be when Gardiner was not by her side. Arnold would have no right to look reproachfully at her, but if he did, she would not be able to meet his eyes.

This was the first time he had come so vividly to mind since that dreadful evening, and she shook herself violently free from the spell. All the goodness that was now in her power was to be faithful to the lover who was so sincere and so devoted. It was not often that she thought of herself as owing any duty to Gardiner. It was the nearness to Mrs. Meredith which stirred her to be so honest with herself and to look at her engagement in a less selfish light than before.

When Wednesday evening arrived, and they entered Mrs. Meredith's drawing-room, they found that Mrs. Stanton was the only other guest. Lilla had not met her since she was Miss Goldthwait, and

seeing her thus without her husband and remembering what Jeffreys had told her of his habits, she expected to see traces of anxiety or sorrow on the bride's face. Not at all. Mrs. Stanton was as merry and unconcerned as ever, spoke often of her husband, and lamented over the engagement which kept him from meeting Miss Wilton.

Mrs. Meredith had changed more than her sister, looking even worn. She gave Lilla a most affectionate welcome, and then devoted herself to Gardiner. Lilla had no reason to be ashamed of her betrothed, even under the criticism of a valued friend. Jeffreys was usually liked in general society. He had an honest, pleasant smile, and of late had developed a promising capacity for small-talk. He seemed to be pleased with Mrs. Meredith, and talked steadily with her till he took her out to the dining-room.

After dinner the ladies reëntered the drawing-room, and Lilla wished she could be allowed a private talk with her hostess, as the latter's looks confirmed the intimation in her note that there was some news to be told. Mrs. Stanton, however, sat down by Lilla and said: —

"Mr. Stanton says he saw you at the theatre the other night. I had a headache and was not out. Indeed, I have not seen you since your great success on the stage. I think that should be repeated for some charity. I will lend Mr. Stanton, if Mr. Gardiner will lend you. What fun it would be! With your present experience, you should do even better. In fact, I think Mr. Gardiner and I would insist on

standing behind the scenes, to regulate the general tone of the play."

"It would be death to the play," returned Lilla. "Imagine Mr. Stanton's catching sight of you every other minute."

"Oh, you two have the good looks for all four of us. Mr. Gardiner and I are loved for our more solid qualities. I think you could put up with an hour of my Fred's courtship for a change. As I remember it, it is very seductive. Come, let 's have a play. Fred would be enchanted. Won't you, now?"

"I refer you to Mr. Gardiner on that point."

"You refer me to Mr. Gardiner? Yet you have been certainly ten days engaged. By that time I had got my bearings, and Mr. Stanton referred everything to me."

"Be careful, dear," put in Mrs. Meredith deprecatingly. "That does n't sound just as you mean it."

"If it troubles you, it does n't certainly. I think it 's a mistake, though, to try to regulate such things by theory. It 's a natural law. The heaviest side of a thing will get to the bottom. On one subject the husband may have the best-considered opinion or the most interest, on another the wife. The thing balances itself. I have an opinion on most things, and Fred has n't. Naturally, an opinion carries the day over no opinion. Most men, I think, have no opinion. When they come to a thing, they know whether they want to do it or not. Usually they don't. I don't call that an opinion, however. It 's simple inertia."

After so much of this conversation that Lilla began to despair of seeing Mrs. Meredith in any satisfactory way, the latter by a whispered hint sent her sister off, then, after adding a stick of wood to the fire, sat down by Lilla and laid her hand affectionately on hers.

"This does one's heart good. I have so much to hear."

"My news is wonderful, of course," said Lilla, "but you have heard it now, and have even seen the successful knight."

"How long have you known him?"

"Only a few months;" and Lilla went on to give an account of her acquaintance with Mr. Gardiner.

"Then you already knew him when we had that talk at Newport about marriage, and you were so cynical."

"I knew nothing about it, then," said Lilla, coloring.

Mrs. Meredith saw the blush, and began to wonder if Lilla's heart had indeed been touched by this half-bald and very unromantic lover. She discovered now how much she had doubted it.

"You found, then, that I was right," she went on more gently. "It is a wonderful relief for a woman to get away from herself and to care for a being so different. It brings back the sense of joyousness which many a girl loses while yet a child even. A man is such a comfort, but there 's no explaining it."

"It can't be explained," said Lilla. "From a common sense point of view it 's absurd, and from an

aesthetic one, impossible. Tell me of yourself now, please. Your note said you had some news."

"Yes, I suppose it will be news to you, though it is no longer a secret. You remember that about a year ago my husband came into some property. Much of it was badly invested, but for some reason he could do nothing about it at the time, and the amount of the matter is that, through a series of calamities, it is worth scarcely one half of what it was, and is an expense instead of a profit."

Lilla fixed her eyes seriously on her hostess to discover how much she felt this calamity. Mrs. Meredith smiled faintly and went on.

"It is not, to tell the truth, much of a blow to me, except through my husband. As far as I can see, we shall live on much the same, except in curtailing a few rather extravagant expenses which we have taken up within the last year. There is a way, however, in which I shall feel it very sorely. I might as well tell you, as Hetty certainly will. We cannot do now for her as we meant to do. It is a disappointment to Mr. Stanton, who is one of a large family. To do him justice, he does not himself take exception to my husband's arrangements; but Hetty cannot reconcile herself, and Tom thinks she is wholly unreasonable. You know Hetty always puts forward many little claims to consideration, and when one is living near her one accepts it. I know Tom used to consider her wishes very carefully at one time. At a little distance, it looks different, and now everything she says and does he takes amiss. Poor Hetty! the statements she makes are easily

criticised, but then she does n't mean them just as she says them, and Tom does n't understand that now he should make allowances for her."

Lilla understood this covert allusion to Mrs. Stanton's disappointment in her husband, and felt with a thrill of pity that Mrs. Meredith, with her high standard of married life, would sorrow far more over this than over any disagreement between her sister and her own husband.

"Mr. Gardiner tells me," she said, "that he knows Mr. Stanton. I must see that he cultivates the acquaintance."

"I hope he will," said Mrs. Meredith, but her voice lacked hopefulness. "Tom is exceedingly pleased to make Mr. Gardiner's acquaintance. Perhaps you hardly know what a reputation Mr. Gardiner has won for himself among business men. I am surprised to find him also so happy in conversation. It hardly speaks well for your heart that your judgment was so well consulted."

"At the age of twenty-six one cannot overlook one's judgment as carelessly as at sixteen."

"I suppose it is well one cannot," said Mrs. Meredith, looking somewhat curiously at her. "Do you ever see Miss Folsom? — Mrs. Willcox she is now."

"Yes, I see her at Mrs. Miller's occasionally," said Lilla. She wondered, as she spoke, if Mrs. Meredith were purposely avoiding all allusion to another common acquaintance. She would have been glad to have Mr. Robertson mentioned, and the spell of the long silence broken.

"She is very happily married, I hear," went on Mrs. Meredith. "I have not seen her since my return, but if I am not mistaken I saw her friend, Miss Granger, at church last Sunday."

"What church do you belong to?" asked Lilla. "I think I have never known."

"We have a pew at St. Thomas's."

Lilla was silent. The answer struck oddly on the feelings that had prompted the question; and she found nothing to say to it. As she sat there silent, she heard Mr. Meredith's voice, and shortly after the gentlemen entered, Mrs. Stanton came back. Mr. Meredith came directly to Lilla's side.

"Have you heard of the new opera, to begin next week? It will be worth hearing. Will you let me get tickets for the four of us for 'Aïda'? Mr. Gardiner tells me you have never seen that."

"I should be delighted, if Mr. Gardiner is free to go."

"Then that is settled, as he is at your service. How thoroughly you have landed him, Miss Wilton! It is a pleasure to see a job so well done. My wife used to tell me you would marry Robertson. Between us two, I like this better. Robertson amuses Emily. He can talk to her by the hour, but for myself I find him a little dull, or I used to do so. Of late I have not seen him. No, I could n't have wished you better, if I had been your father; and, by the way, would you like me to take that rôle and talk business with Mr. Gardiner? He ought to make you a handsome settlement, and needs, I am sure, only the suggestion. I never saw a man in a more promising condition."

"I have every claim to it, have I not?"

"I am serious, Miss Wilton. If you don't believe me, I 'll get Emily to talk to you. If I had settled a handsome sum on her, we should both be thankful for it now, and so would Hetty. You are worth anything he could do for you, and if you do not object, I will drop him a hint to that effect quite on my own responsibility. A man likes a thing none the less because he is made to pay for it. Now that is as true as gospel, and you may take my word for it."

"You are very kind to take such an interest in me."

"I have an interest, for Emily's sake. He ought to do well by you, by Jove he ought. If a brother-in-law is fair game, a lover may well be."

"Come here, Tom, I want you to see this photograph;" Mrs. Meredith thus interrupted, holding out a photograph which Gardiner had just shown her.

Jeffreys raised his eyes to Lilla's, as if to apologize for the act. Mr. Meredith was delighted with the picture.

"I must have one of these. It 's magnificent. Mr. Gardiner has, perhaps, however, ordered the plate broken at once. A friend of mine did that once with less excuse. See, Miss Wilton, how well it looks on my mantelpiece! I am sure you will give one to Emily, and what is Emily's is mine."

"That 's a favorite fiction of yours," said his wife.

"Not to say a lie, eh?" said Mr. Meredith, bend-

ing to look into her face. "I see one thing that is mine, and that is a kiss, by Jove."

Before she could remonstrate, he had kissed her on the lips.

"Oh, Tom!" ejaculated Mrs. Meredith.

"It 's done now," said the latter, strolling, off. "I can't think of any remedy for you but divorce on the ground of cruel and inhuman treatment;" and Mr. Meredith burst into a laugh so natural and contagious that his wife in spite of herself could not repress a smile.

Mr. Meredith dropped into a chair near Lilla.

"It is your fault," he said. "You make me young again. I have always told Emily, too, that if she limits me on one kind of champagne, she must be generous with the other."

During this episode, Gardiner was standing silent and very grave. Mr. Meredith felt his influence, and addressed him in a tone much more sober.

"Miss Wilton is willing to hear 'Aïda.' Shall we call it an engagement for Monday, the opening night?"

"I am quite at your service."

"I have n't mentioned it to Her Grace the Duchess of Meredith," pursued Mr. Meredith with a humble glance towards his wife. "Her favor is indispensable."

Mrs. Meredith felt badly that her sister, being present, should not be included, but she answered serenely, —

"I, too, accept with pleasure."

At this moment a servant approached Mr. Mere-

dith with some announcement, and the latter repeated with surprise, —

"Mr. Stanton? Is he coming up?"

"He has called for Mrs. Stanton and is coming up."

The servant, as he said this, answered Mr. Meredith's questioning look with a significant nod, and the latter walked angrily to Mrs. Stanton's chair.

"I will go down immediately," said Hetty, very pale, and trying to escape from her brother-in-law. It was in vain. His savage whisper was audible to every one in the room, and, turning on his heel after this outburst, he went quickly to the stairs.

Mrs. Stanton rose without a word and gave her hand to Lilla and to Gardiner. With her sister she exchanged simply a look. Mrs. Meredith wore an expression so heart-rending that neither of her guests dared watch her. Jeffreys went to Lilla's side and made some indifferent remarks until Mr. Meredith returned and met his wife's eyes.

"What do you mean, Tom?" said Mrs. Meredith with a strange sharpness. "Go down with Hetty."

Mr. Meredith turned without a word and went down.

The evening was a short one after this. Lilla took her leave as soon as the carriage was announced. Mr. Meredith, in accompanying her to the door, made the first reference to what had happened.

"I am sorry Stanton called. We are not on the best of terms for the moment."

"So Mrs. Meredith told me."

"She pretends, I suppose, that I am responsible for this marriage."

"She said nothing as to that."

"What an unconscionable fool!" said Mr. Meredith grimly. "To be drunk at ten in the evening and then to call on his wife's relatives! He deserves to be horsewhipped."

Lilla was silent, as she and Gardiner drove away from the Merediths' door. Jeffreys had uttered a few quiet words of courtesy in putting her wraps about her, and his gravity and reserve were doubly acceptable after the confidences from her host, which she felt were themselves the result of the wine-cup.

After a few moments she said, —

"Did I do wrong to accept for Monday?"

"Wrong?" repeated Jeffreys, with a tender light in his eyes. "No, I am much pleased. Mrs. Meredith is one of the sweetest women I ever met, and her husband is a very interesting talker."

Lilla was again silent. Her thoughts were continually with Mrs. Meredith. She understood now more clearly how Arnold Robertson might have helped her over some of her rough places. It was wonderful that he could do so without making any estrangement between husband and wife. Mr. Meredith simply thought him dull.

"Mrs. Meredith is such a saint," said Lilla to herself. "She would not talk of these things, nor appeal even tacitly to his pity. She contrives to think her husband one of the best of men. It 's a miracle, but saints do miracles. Then, in some odd

way, she finds comfort in Mr. Robertson, without apparently seeing the comparison thus suggested. If she had but loved him first, instead of Mr. Meredith! What a noble marriage it would have been! And Arnold would have had a wife and a home worthy of him. But this is the way we women do.

"She would not speak to me of Arnold; — not a word. Just because, as Mr. Meredith said, she used to think — Well, she must know that it was he who left me. But she would not even mention his name or tell me of his whereabouts. She did not think me worthy of that."

When the carriage had reached Lilla's door, Jeffreys dismissed it.

"It is late, I think," said Lilla, a little troubled. "I cannot ask you upstairs."

"No, but cannot I have a few words before you go up?"

"Oh, yes," said Lilla cordially. "The lights are still burning, too, for a wonder."

Of all the phases of Lilla's attractiveness in the eyes of her lover, none had filled his heart with deeper content than her present quiet mood and the pathos in her eyes. He attributed it to Mrs. Meredith's influence, and the man who had before exulted that his betrothed had no close friends among women was now profoundly grateful for this exception.

For Gardiner's engagement had not been to him a matter of untroubled satisfaction. He could never count beforehand on Lilla's moods. She cared more than he did for social excitement; she sometimes forgot her usual tact and wasted the precious

minutes he could have with her by exasperating preoccupation with matters of dress or incidental worries. Her times of softness towards him were not at all to be had on demand. In his discouraged moments he had leaped to the conviction that there was no underlying love to which he could safely appeal, but merely conciliatory moods: and then at unexpected moments he would be overwhelmed by heavenly revelations of her truth, her purity, her wonderful beauty, and her dependence on him.

Of late much had happened to try him. She had at times an unpleasant way of giving him direct commands, not with the underlying tone of affection which would have made them but a new form of rapture, but with an affectation of imperiousness. Other oddities of manner, almost vulgar, or at any rate wholly different from her usual simplicity and good taste, made him wonder for the moment whether she was undergoing some deterioration of character, or whether this was her natural self appearing through the disguises of good breeding.

Since the day, however, when with softened eyes she had showed him Mrs. Meredith's card and note, she had been steadily at her best. If she were really as susceptible as that to the companionship of noble-minded women, it became simple self-protection on his part to watch carefully her associates and occupations.

To-night, he had no feeling but that of complete love and reverence, and he was anxious to disconnect himself in her eyes with the brutal habits and appetites with which some men were cursed. He stood

opposite her as she sat in a straight-backed chair under the lighted chandelier. The light was more glaring than in her own sitting-room, but it brought into full effect the waves of her light brown hair and the tender whiteness of her neck and hands, well set off by the mouse-color of her velvet dinner dress and the old lace at her wrists. She looked like an old portrait.

"I am as much delighted with Mrs. Meredith as you could wish me to be," began Jeffreys. "I wish I could do something to make life easier to her."

"You know Mr. Stanton," said Lilla. "Is it possible to influence him at all?"

"It is very easy," said Gardiner; "only too easy. I think his wife could do something, if she were willing to have patience; but an outsider can have but a momentary effect."

"Why not induce him to withdraw wholly from temptation?"

"To live away from the world? His wife would be the first to object."

"You think his wife might do something with him?"

"Well, I will not say so certainly. But he makes a great many resolutions, and I know he cares very much as to what his wife thinks of him. I fear she is unlike her sister in her conception of a wife's duties, and no longer conceals her contempt."

Lilla looked at him to see if the implication were intended, and replied, —

"Mrs. Meredith has no such feeling towards her husband."

"Indeed!"

"Are you not a little hard on Mr. Meredith? He is very kind, and has a fine touch of honor about him. I have never seen him the worse for wine, unless you may think he was so to-night. His wife's devotion does everything for him."

"But how degrading for a man to owe everything to his wife's influence!"

Lilla looked up, surprised at this echo from her own secret thought. Jeffreys went on after a moment's silence.

"I spoke hastily, perhaps; but to-night he so little deserved his wife that I can scarcely believe she did not herself feel it."

After this there was another silence, Jeffreys taking immense satisfaction in the charming picture before him.

"When we are married," said Lilla at length, raising her eyes to see how this opening might affect her lover, "are we to have a pew at St. Thomas's?"

Jeffreys laughed aloud at the question.

"I should not wonder at all. I expect to be placed in the most remarkable situations. There is so much state and circumstance about a woman; she is allied to everything that is going on. So that a poor, lone man, who has attended strictly to business and wondered at the amount other people found in life to fuss over, will discover himself after marriage to be of a piece with the whole universe. I expect to be vice-president of half a dozen charitable societies, to become a connoisseur in table-linen and silver plate, to have views on education, to give a

send-off to missionary bishops, and to discard completely the society of such freethinkers as I myself used to be."

"Are you a freethinker?"

"Well, yes; I don't suppose I believe one tenth of what you do. We men rather like to have the women do the religion for us. They have a born predilection for it."

"Then really and truly you don't believe in Christianity?"

"Must you trouble yourself, darling, as to what I believe or don't believe? A woman seems able to do more in that line than a man, but I want you to believe all that you do. I myself have never wholly liked women who have lost their faith. There is a lack of depth and sweetness about them. I am wholly respectful towards what you may think, and I want you to feel entirely free. You will find, I think, that you will have money enough at your free disposition to help along any cause you may think worthy; and as for pews at St. Thomas's, take half a dozen if you wish, only don't put me at the head of any one of them. I shall never be able to repay to the church the benefit I hope shortly to receive from her."

"What has the church to do with that? She simply provides a ceremonial and throws a little mystic sanctity about it."

"I am glad of every safeguard and consecration which human effort can throw about that day, and if there is a way of securing a divine blessing, may that, too, be on it! You have not the least concep-

tion, Lilla, of what the love of you is to me, how it makes me a daily miracle to myself. I have not always been pure in my thoughts, nor in the highest sense upright in my actions. I have been very much like other men, and now, would to God I had been most unlike them! Even when I first asked for the right to love you, I had no conception of this state of things. My love turns to holiness as naturally as a bud changes to a flower. I don't understand it. When I knelt by you the other day and caught the soft warmth and fragrance of the light cloak just fallen from your shoulders, I was wrapped in a deep peace of heart as a man who hears heavenly music. I loved you as one loves one's home and one's childhood. When I am away from you, I am still wonderfully happy, happier than ever almost, for then I find out how real it is. You will laugh at me, but I think I was happier when alone at my window, the other morning, looking at the sunshine, than ever in my life before or since. God bless you!"

Jeffreys ended with undisguised tears in his eyes; Lilla sat in perfect silence, shading her eyes from the light and from him. After a few moments he went on in a voice more composed.

"You know all this, but once in a while I must say it. It 's a new sensation to me to be growing the right way, and I don't quite believe in it yet."

"Did I tell you that Belle Vanderzee called today?" asked Lilla after a pause.

"No."

"She brought a little packet for you, which unfortunately is upstairs."

"Have you opened it?"

"How could I dare? A packet of letters tied with a pink ribbon returned to you after your engagement!"

"The contents are certainly of a most matrimonial character. Miss Vanderzee said she would send me samples of engraving such as 'Mr. and Mrs. —— request,' etc. 'Please present this at the church,' and 'Reception from two till four.' I thought you would choose one, and I would have it copied."

"An easy way of settling our differences as to date. The package is on my desk, if you want to get it."

Gardiner went upstairs and returned with the wedding-cards and with a note he had found lying near them. Lilla, surprised, tore this open, saw the name of Howard Raynor at the bottom, and read in silence, —

"Not finding you in, I venture to leave a note. I am trying to secure the position of assistant ticket agent at the Madison Square Theatre. Mr. Gardiner's recommendation would be of great service. Can you procure it for me?"

"Would you be kind enough to put that in the fire?"

Jeffreys took the crumpled note and threw it on top of the dying coals.

"Now," he said, drawing up a chair for himself, "we must choose our form of advertisement."

The next day by an odd chance Miss Wilton met Howard Raynor. She had alighted from the Fifth Avenue omnibus near the jeweler's, for her engage-

ment had restored her to the confidence of this creditor. Raynor happened to be standing at the street corner. Lilla had never forgiven his insolence at their last meeting, nor his impertinence in looking over her letters, and she determined instantly to take no notice of him, but she had hardly reached the sidewalk when she missed her shopping bag, which that morning contained jewelry.

"My bag!" she exclaimed. "It is in the omnibus."

Raynor understood the situation at a glance, and pulling his hands from the pockets of his jacket said hastily, —

"I will get it. Step into the apothecary's."

He was off in a jiffy, and Lilla, finding that the wind was bitingly cold, acted on his advice. The thought crossed her mind that her messenger was none of the safest, but she was forced instantly to be ashamed of the thought, as he returned, ruddy and alert, with the missing bag in his hand.

"Thank you," said Miss Wilton, without rising from the chair the apothecary's clerk had given her. "I am really much relieved."

"Don't mention it," said Raynor. "It has warmed me up."

Lilla saw that he was indeed cold. His clothes were poorer than she had ever before seen him wear, and his short jacket was but a slight protection on such a morning. His manner, however, had the same ease as when his trousers had no ragged edge.

As she sat warmly wrapped in fur, she had the odd feeling that both of them were playing parts on

a stage, and that in the green-room of life they would soon find themselves on a par, the one without his poverty and the other without her temporary splendor. A smile lingering on Raynor's lips suggested that he, too, saw deeper than the apparent situation.

"I received your note," said Lilla, "but I could not ask any such favor of Mr. Gardiner. He knows nothing of you."

"I thought you would speak for me. However, it makes no difference now. The place is taken."

"And you have no employment?"

"No visible means of support. Still I live, and occasionally, as now, find the sensation pleasant."

"You have done me a great service, and must let me express my gratitude in a tangible way."

"No apology is needed, I assure you."

"Have you been out of work ever since I saw you last?"

"I might more honestly say, ever since you saw me first. It is a new idea of mine to work, suggested by my bad luck at play."

"And how long is it since your bad luck began?"

"Well, that dates pretty nearly from the time we last met. You have always brought me luck, but unfortunately you take it away with you. I am not sorry, since you have used it so well. I am not always a loser when you are a gainer."

"That is very pretty. How did you know of my engagement?"

"My wife heard of it from the artist for whom she sometimes sits."

"This is still more mysterious," said Lilla, unable to repress her bit of sarcasm. "How have you happened to meet your wife?"

"I have been hard up, you know, and Mrs. Raynor sent for me to come home, so I tried it for a time. There is something mighty queer about Mrs. Raynor just now. She is very forgiving and meek. Some one has been preaching to her, I imagine. I could n't stand it long, that 's all I know. I ran away again, only now I sometimes call on her."

Lilla meanwhile had opened her pocketbook.

"I meant to give you two tens," she said, "but I have n't two. Here is one ten and a five, though, and you may take some of this silver."

"I will call this evening for the rest."

"You are not to come near my door again," said Lilla, pausing to look at him with all the severity she could assume. "If you disobey me, my good fortune will no longer bring you any."

"I won't, then, and if you will excuse me, I will depart at once to indulge in an oyster stew, some beef and onions, and a bottle of lager. I hope your dinner will taste as good, but it can't, for it won't have cost you so much — starvation."

"Have you been starving?"

"I did n't say so, and would n't mention it to a lady if I had. Then after dinner, or breakfast, I shall call on Mrs. Raynor. I always make it a rule to call on her after meals, to avoid boring her too often. A hungry husband, too, is not a handsome object. And to-night, by Jove, I 'll give my luck another chance, and drink your health in something very good and hot."

Howard was becoming so warm and merry at the prospect, that Lilla was very glad when he stopped and gave signs of leaving.

"Send me a line when you lose your bag again," he said, and making her a low bow, he left the shop.

In a moment his head reappeared.

"You did n't look to see if everything was there;" and with a shout which was halfway between a yell and an attempt at singing he was off.

Lilla opened her bag in real alarm, but found everything safe.

"I might have known it," she said; "he deceives other people, but he would n't deceive me."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE next day Jeffreys appeared early at Miss Wilton's, intending to accompany her to Albany, where his parents were expecting them both.

Mr. Gardiner senior had some weeks before called on his future daughter-in-law, and Lilla had been grievously disappointed in him. He did not even look like his son. He was tall and a little cadaverous, and his attempts at cordiality were far from acceptable. His conversation turned chiefly on people of whom Lilla knew nothing, and he was like many of Jeffreys' friends, though unlike Jeffreys himself, in the respect with which he spoke of wealth. Lilla was well aware that Jeffreys' parents had always lived on slender means till their son was able to help them, and that they were not people of education or polish; but she had expected more simplicity and warm-heartedness. Mr. Gardiner seemed to look on her as one more proof of Jeffreys' cleverness; he noticed her dress in a way which made her wish that she had for once neglected her toilet; and after kissing her with some sentimentality, in spite of her manœuvres to escape that ceremony, he went off very well content. As, however, Jeffreys had never spoken much of his father, but often and affectionately of his mother, Lilla had nerved herself to the Albany trip, hoping to find

either in her or in the married daughter some resemblance to Jeffreys himself.

When the appointed day came, Lilla received by the first delivery a letter from Jeffreys' mother, which half touched and half displeased her. It was evidently written with some anxiety, as to a fine lady whose tastes and prejudices could not be foretold. It spoke very affectionately of Jeffreys, and very solemnly of the religious influences which should be thrown about him. It expressed the pleasure they all felt at her proposed visit, and gave the names of those who had been invited to meet her during the few hours she would be in Albany. In closing it reverted again to the humble strain and was signed, "Your very sincere friend and well-wisher."

Lilla was highly displeased to find that the neighbors were invited in to meet her. Jeffreys had avoided promising a Sunday to escape the laborious church-going which his mother would be sure to impose on Lilla, and the latter had induced him to refuse to spend even one night; and now, whether from distrust of their own powers of entertainment, or from a desire of display, they had contrived this gathering to take place within the few hours she was to be with them.

When Gardiner arrived a little later, he found Lilla in unmistakable house-costume, sitting by her fire.

"I have a headache," was her explanation. "I am sorry, Jeffreys, but you will have to telegraph, for I don't feel fit to go."

Jeffreys looked at her with momentary suspicion. She so seldom was in any way ill.

"I am all the more sorry," continued Lilla, "because I have a most kind letter from your mother, and she has invited some friends to meet me. I should be as dull as — Mr. Garth. I really don't feel at all well."

"I am sorry. Did you have a bad night?"

"I dreamed a good deal. I dreamed you were engaged to some one else and were not in the least ashamed of it."

"I must telegraph at once, then. I suppose we cannot fix any other day, either."

"Yes, do telegraph, and then come back. We will have a cosy morning together."

"I 'm afraid I can't do that. I ought to go to my office."

Lilla looked offended.

"No one expects you. You were to be away."

"It 's different when one is obliged to be away."

"I 'll oblige you. I 'll never forgive you if you don't."

"That would hardly be believed. You know I want to stay. That must suffice, I think."

"You never do unreasonable things simply to please me, and yet that is the great proof of love. I want you to make some sacrifice for me. I should like to find out if there is n't something as obligatory in loving a woman as in a business engagement. I want some one to read to me, and I choose to have you do it."

Lilla looked defiantly at him, and the sternness left his face.

"I will return at once," he said, and bent to kiss her hand.

"Now may I see my mother's letter?"

Jeffreys had returned from sending his telegram, and was half-reclining on a sofa, with his feet to the fire. Lilla handed it to him, and he read and dropped it without remark.

"I showed you the place. Why don't you begin? Here I am paying you by the hour."

"Paying me? In what do you pay me?" said Jeffreys, taking up the book he had been ordered to read.

"Caramels, of course. Here is one in advance."

Lilla unwrapped one from its paper and held it near him. As he did not take it, she put it in her own mouth and took up her knitting.

"They are bad for the headache," said Jeffreys gravely.

"Not at all. I always take them."

"Think of what is going on down town. There is a meeting to-day, preparatory to an agreement for reduction of fares. Then a deputation of employees, or their representatives, are to wait on me as soon as convenient to confer on wages. Reduced fares and higher wages, those are my upper and nether grindstones. And here am I reading Ouida's novels and seeing you eat caramels. Supposing my aggrieved artisans found me thus employed. They might pretend I had it in my power to disobey you."

As Gardiner spoke, he looked for the moment as if he were really trying to get the courage to do so. However, after but a moment's hesitation, he took up the book and began reading.

Lilla listened for a long time without comment. Occasionally she dropped her knitting and watched the reader. Once while she was thus idle, her ball of yarn fell to the floor. Gardiner started from the sofa and returned it to her. He brought her a shawl, too, as she seemed cold, and, after whispering a short sentence in her ear, returned to his book. He had hardly begun when Lilla rose and began pacing the room.

"Don't stop," she said. "I can hear;" and back and forth she continued to walk, till at last she came and stood at the head of the sofa. When Jeffreys had finished a paragraph, she placed her hand lightly on his shoulder and said, —

"Do you know, Jeffreys, that I am not good enough for you?"

Gardiner took her hand in his and looked up at her over his shoulder. He was startled at the expression on her face. Perhaps, after all, she was really ill.

"If you will but love me as I do you, it is all the goodness I ask for."

A look of despair crossed Lilla's face, and she said presently, —

"You know I don't do that."

"I thought you had given up stabbing such daggers into me. You tell me the opposite by all your actions and most of your words, and then once in a long time you say a thing like that. It 's my belief that you don't know what you mean by it."

"I know that you are growing better every day, and I am growing worse."

"Why should you grow worse, my darling?"

"That is what I wish you would tell me."

Lilla withdrew her hand from his, and turned, so that he could not see her face.

"We ought to grow better together," said Jeffreys. "Why can't we do that?"

"A man is n't like a woman," said Lilla bitterly. "A man can be very bad in some ways; he may be selfish and like a beast, and may do horrible things, and then there is another side to him, and there he does good things. He does n't condemn himself completely. He says, 'That was bad, but this is good.' At the gate of heaven, St. Peter must be very careful to see all sides of a man, and weigh one thing against another; while with a woman he need but look once in her eyes, and he will know where to send her."

"I suppose there is some truth in that," said Gardiner. "A man is many-sided. A bad husband may be a reforming politician; or a drunkard, a very useful inventor. In parts he is thoroughly good, and that 's the reason these Calvinistic doctrines of depravity won't go down — with men at least; women may be different, and fortunately they have their own beliefs and methods."

"I have n't, Jeffreys. It 's a dreadful thing to say, but I don't believe a thing if only women believe it. I have n't strength of my own. Many women have, and you are so good that you ought to have a wife like that, who can stand alone in the faith that keeps her pure."

"Thank heaven, I have the privilege of choosing

my own wife. I would n't touch one of those self-righteous fanatics with a ten foot-pole. A husband should lead his wife, and not the wife her husband."

Lilla's face was deeply troubled, but her words were very slow in forming themselves.

"Of course," pursued Jeffreys, "a woman can't wholly discard her own habits of mind. She is more conservative and clings to precedent. She is fond of having her moral emotions excited, and she is more credulous than a man. Her methods must naturally differ from a man's, but she need n't insist that they are binding on every one. That is just what these devout wives do, however, and sometimes they live all their lives in an undisturbed sense of superiority to the men by their sides, who are accomplishing ten times more good in the world."

"But I am not true to myself," persisted Lilla, her lips quivering a little.

"What have you done, Lilla, for heaven's sake? I do believe a woman gets a sort of inflammation of the moral nerves, so that they pain her at the slightest touch. Come down to facts and deeds, and judge yourself by them. I hate this endless spinning of theoretical cobwebs. I call it unprincipled piety. A man comes to care more for some supernatural and incredible dogma than for the simplest duties of kindness and good faith. It 's rotten humbug, and that 's the long and short of that."

"Your language is not obscure."

Lilla sat down as she spoke and took up her knitting. Jeffreys continued.

"If you are in a mood for self-examination, I

should advise you to apply what I have just said to your conduct about next January. Kindness and good faith are my favorite virtues. If you will have the kindness to fix on January 22d, or better still, the 15th, and the good faith to bring your preparations up to time, you will fulfill your present highest duty to your fellow-man, as represented in my person. That I should call practical religion. At present I hold a monopoly of the three Christian graces, faith, hope, and charity, and I can't long stand the strain."

"I thought it was settled for the 22d."

"It is so, if you thought it so. You said once it might be as early as the 15th, but I had rather have it settled for the 22d, than doubtful for the 15th. Shall we fix it then, absolutely?"

Jeffreys had risen and was bending affectionately over her.

"Oh, Jeffreys, don't get in my light," said Lilla sharply. "If you only won't be affectionate about it, we *will* fix it absolutely for the 22d."

Gardiner turned away, stroking his mustache. In a moment he said cheerfully, —

"That was what you might call a sugar-coated pill turned the wrong side out."

As he spoke, a knock was heard, and Lilla's maid entered carrying two letters, which Miss Wilton took up carelessly. Both were sent by messenger, and one was in a writing she had not seen for months. Her hand began to tremble, and she steadied it on the arm of her chair and wondered if Gardiner were watching her.

"Something wrong with the theatre-party?" he asked.

His tone reassured her.

"I will see," she said. "It isn't Mrs. Meredith's writing. Can't you mend the fire a little? There is more wood in the cupboard."

Lilla went to the window. If she could but think of some excuse to send him from the room, from the house. It was impossible. She broke the seal and read: —

DEAR MISS WILTON, — I am now enough better to sit much of the day in the library and to see a few visitors. I have tried to persuade myself that you will anticipate the far-off, slow-coming day when I can go to you, and that in some way you will arrange to come to see an invalid very tired of his own thoughts. My sister is still in the South, but our housekeeper, Mrs. Ainslie, will welcome you and any one you may care to bring with you.

If it will not do, at least write and tell me so. It is three months since I have seen or heard from you. About three weeks ago I had a note like this written to you, and then I had a relapse, and Mrs. Ainslie did not send it.

Yours most faithfully,

ARNOLD ROBERTSON.

The other note was signed "Martha Ainslie," and ran as follows: —

DEAR MADAM, —You will pardon me, I am sure, for adding a line of my own, unknown to Mr. Arnold. I am his housekeeper and have been his nurse, too, for these three months.

He has been very ill, and is still feebler than he thinks. However, a short visit from you will not injure him as much as it would to defer it still longer. May I ask you to be so kind as to come ten minutes or more before the hour you fix with him, so that I can speak with you without it 's worrying him? He will be in a back room, and will not be disturbed. Early in the afternoon is perhaps his best time, if convenient to you.

I hope, Miss, you will excuse the liberty I take in writing, and believe me,

Yours to command, MARTHA AINSLIE.

Lilla sat in silence. While Gardiner was in the room, she could not even think. She could not understand what she read. How could she send him off ?"

"Well," he said, turning at last and smiling, "what is the news?"

"Nothing from Mrs. Meredith; nothing that you would know about."

"Something more for me to throw on the fire, asking no questions? This is hard. See here," continued Jeffreys, taking a package of letters from his breast pocket. "Read any of those you like, — any or all."

"Ah yes," said Lilla with an effort. "You can leave down-town everything compromising."

"Oh," said Jeffreys with pretended indignation. He took again his seat by the fire and in a moment said gravely, —

"You will not, I think, have the false delicacy to hide from me any indebtedness which may trouble you. If you really have regard for my feelings, you will not let any bill go unpaid for lack of ready money. We are differently situated towards each other than is usual. If you will excuse my saying so, I think your only honorable course towards me would be entire frankness."

"Oh, Jeffreys, don't. It is n't that. There is no particular mystery hidden here."

There was, unfortunately, a tremor in Lilla's voice as she said this, and Gardiner did not drop the subject as he might otherwise have done. He asked very deliberately, —

"Is there any objection, then, to my knowing what the letters are about?"

"No, of course not," said Lilla, now speaking in a more natural voice. "This is from a young fellow, a former acquaintance, who is just now a convalescent from a fever or something of that sort. He is bored with being shut up at home, and thought I might get proper company and pay him a visit to distract his mind."

"What is his name?"

"Robertson," said Lilla, turning pale. She hoped the name would have no significance to Jeffreys, and indeed, he did not appear to find it familiar.

"Well," he said, still gazing at the fire "there 's considerable impudence about that, I must say."

A flush of surprised anger leaped into Lilla's cheeks, but she controlled herself, and at last said,

"It is possible, as he has been ill, that he has not heard of my engagement."

"Quite probable, I should say. Suppose you inform him."

"You would rather not have me go then?"

"Do you wish to go?" asked Jeffreys, surprised.

"I should have wished to, if you had no objection. I like to amuse invalids. They are so grateful for the least attention."

"Then I would not begin with the greatest. I can scarcely believe you are mine to withhold, but since you are, I am selfish about it. When your young friend recovers, he must come to me and have it out."

It was long, long after this, when Gardiner took his leave, and Lilla could again look at those appalling letters. She must determine just what they meant, for on that and that alone depended her action. Arnold had been very ill. Why had he not told her? He could not have been delirious and unconscious for three months. Had he wished, he could surely have let her know. It did not occur to him till he was better. Lilla's cheek began to flush. He offered no apology for those days of silence when she was wearing out her heart in watching. He said practically, —

"I find this rather tedious and am willing to try again a little of your society. You, of course, will be delighted."

When Lilla dragged down the letter to where she

was kneeling by her sofa, she found that it did not read as cavalierly as she was beginning to suppose. There was something strange hidden here that he could write so simply and earnestly, but without explanation.

Well, she must refuse. It was the only thing to do. Mrs. Ainslie said he would worry. What had she herself been through? But then the poor fellow was ill and feeble, and she — she of all women — could not hurt him.

"I am an idiot," murmured Lilla fiercely between her teeth. "I won't make it hard for him then, but I can do nothing but refuse."

She went to her desk and wrote: —

"I am very much grieved to hear you have been so ill. I knew nothing of it till your note came.

"I am so sorry, too, that I cannot go to see you. By the time I am more at leisure, I hope you will be well enough to come here.

"If I had known of your illness, I should have sent to inquire about you. I supposed you were out of town."

Lilla sent for a messenger, and again threw herself on her knees by her sofa.

"That is the best way," she said to herself. "It is the only way, in fact. Three months of illness! Can he have been through that? Perhaps he was in danger of his life. I knew nothing. Nobody would tell me; not even Mrs. Meredith. And he did not want me."

Impatient that the messenger did not come, she began to compose imaginary notes, conveying an

opposite answer. Supposing she had consented to go, how could she have put it? She could not have told of her engagement. If he knew that, he would hardly wish to see her. He would know it soon through Mrs. Meredith. Perhaps already the news had come to him. Yes, it was far safer to refuse.

The messenger came at last, and Lilla gave the note to her maid to be carried down to him. Then she stood in dumb suffering, looking after her. Why was this necessary? It was n't. It could n't be.

"Stop!" she cried, going to the stairs. "Let me have that again for a moment."

Now she saw the matter differently. Arnold had written to her as a friend, as he had always spoken. She could see him without compromising herself, and if Jeffreys was not able to forgive her, why, there were two birds killed with the same stone. If he did forgive her — and what else could he do? — he would learn better than to issue orders so high-handedly. Because she must see Arnold face to face. She must learn the truth. After she had seen with her own eyes his friendly indifference, she would have a new weapon against her own weakness. She would learn to be happy in her engagement, and Jeffreys would be the gainer by it all. Thus the messenger bore a very different answer. She would call at half past two the next day, and, as Mrs. Ainslie was to receive her, did not think it necessary to provide herself with company.

Gardiner, before leaving her in the morning, had arranged to take her in the evening to the Vander-

zees'. To Lilla's surprise, however, he was awaiting her at half past five, when she returned from a trip down-town. It flashed on her mind that he was watching her movements. He was not apt at disguising his feelings and looked a little disconcerted at her surprise. He put at last a direct question as to her doings that afternoon, and she took pleasure in affecting at first some mystery about them.

On their return from a gay evening at the Vanderzees', Gardiner had thrown off some of his heaviness. He did not leave, however, without asking, —

"Have you answered Mr. Robertson's note?"

"Yes," said Lilla.

She thought he would be too proud to ask if she had obeyed him, but he went on unflinchingly.

"Of course you wrote declining."

"Of course," said Lilla, with her heart in her mouth. "Well, I did at first," she added to herself, "and it is cowardly in him to ask."

The last shadow left Gardiner's face at this assurance. He was now ashamed of his question, and said frankly, —

"I am much obliged to you, Lilla. To me there were no two ways about it."

The next morning dawned bright and frosty. Gardiner appeared after breakfast, bringing his father's answer to his telegram. It was more forgiving than could well have been expected. Gardiner brought also some flowers, — white pinks, forget-me-nots, and maidenhair. He seemed to know that

she would still be in her pale-blue morning-dress, for his nosegay harmonized perfectly, as it lay near her white throat.

"Still almost eleven weeks," he whispered as he took his leave. "Will they ever be lived through?"

CHAPTER XX.

For the second time did Lilla start alone on foot for Robertson's house, but this time by daylight, with the assurance that she was to see him. She rang, and was admitted into the old-fashioned, low-studded hall, and from there was shown into a reception-room, uncarpeted and evidently not yet opened for the winter, yet well-cleaned and polished, and cheerful with light both from the front and side.

She had inquired for Mrs. Ainslie, and in a very few moments the housekeeper appeared.

Her hair was white, her face broad and unmistakably Scotch, her manner observant, but extremely respectful. Upon Lilla's making a point of it, she took a seat, meanwhile explaining the disarray of the reception-room. There was, indeed, something so pointedly attentive in Mrs. Ainslie's manner, and her face lit up with so much pleasure when her guest made some gracious, jocular reply to her apologies, that a strange dread grew on Lilla's heart. She had lifted her dark blue veil, and the pallor of her face became thereby strikingly apparent.

"And how is Mr. Robertson?" asked Lilla, when the apologies were over.

"Well, Miss, he improves slowly. One day is not much better than the one before, but at the end of a week he is stronger. To-day he was partly

dressed before taking his breakfast. It will be one of his good days, I think. Yesterday he was not so well, and worried quite a little, waiting for your answer. When it came, he took his supper and went to bed. I thought him a little feverish, but the dear boy actually put his arms about my neck as he used to do and said, 'Don't worry, Martie,' — that 's what they all call me, — 'I 'm not excited, I 'm better; and I 'll prove it to you by sleeping like a top.' And so he did, Miss."

"What sort of illness has he had?"

Lilla's voice was not as self-possessed as she tried to make it. Mrs. Ainslie felt bound not to notice her emotion, and paused a moment to hide her own.

"We call it malarial fever, Miss, but it was a bad case. Mr. Arnold had been taking care of a friend in Staten Island, and was taken ill directly he returned. At first I thought it was typhoid, but the doctor said all along it was n't, and I suppose he was right."

"And you have had the whole care?"

"Yes, Miss. The family is in Virginia. Mrs. Monroe is failing slowly. I doubt if she lives through this coming winter. Miss Minnie would not, of course, leave Miss Edith alone. The younger children are at school. I would n't let them come near the house, for I did n't know how the illness might turn; but Master Philip has got ahead of me. He 's in the house now, though he goes back to school in a few days."

"I suppose Mr. Robertson was very ill from the first. Was he delirious?"

"He had times of delirium, Miss, but usually was simply in a high fever and a sort of stupor."

"And Mrs. Meredith, has she been here?"

"She came as soon as she returned to town. Mr. Arnold was better that day, and she went up to his bedroom and saw him. After that Mr. Arnold wrote a letter to you, and I was to send it. Then he was worse again and I kept it back, and for some days he was too ill even to ask about it. When he knew, he was really angry, but he could n't say anything, for he knew he could n't have seen you. I made a bargain with him to wait just three weeks from the day of his relapse. That was yesterday. I found him writing his note the moment he had finished breakfast. I laughed to myself to think he was so shrewd."

Mrs. Ainslie paused. She was not sure Miss Wilton was listening, and she was struck by the whiteness of her face. "Are you feeling ill, Miss? Perhaps you find it close in here. Let me get you a glass of sherry."

"I would like some sherry."

Mrs. Ainslie stepped out to give the order, then returned.

"You have something special to say to me?" asked Lilla.

"Just what I have been telling you, Miss, so that you would know how little he can bear as yet. You will know how to manage it better than I can tell you, to avoid excitement of any kind."

"I think," said Lilla, with a sudden quivering of the lips, "that I will not see him at all just yet, if

you can explain it to him. I fear I could not manage it as you wish. I will wait till he is stronger. I — I don't feel really equal to it myself."

"I beg of you, Miss, don't give up seeing him. It would be the worst thing you could possibly do. See, here is the sherry. Take a little, do; and then go up, if only for a few moments."

Lilla took the glass. In spite of her miserable forebodings, she was not without a wish to see him and understand the worst. As she took it, she heard steps on the stairs. A faintness came over her, and the glass slipped from her hand, breaking in pieces on the bare floor.

Mrs. Ainslie made not the slightest exclamation.

"I will get you another, Miss. This is Master Philip. I suppose Mr. Arnold sent him."

Philip Robertson, a boy of fifteen, now entered the room. He had been hesitating shyly on the stairs, but at the sound of breaking glass had roused his courage. Lilla raised her sad eyes to his, and the sight banished all his boyish timidity.

"Don't mind," he said. "Mrs. Ainslie will get you another glass. Luckily, it did not fall on your dress."

Philip's face bore a striking likeness to his brother's, or so it seemed to Lilla. Arnold's expression was there in a pure, boyish version. He came and stood near her.

"Arnold is waiting for you."

"What shall I do, Philip? Shall I go up?"

Lilla actually put thus into words the question at her heart. She felt as if she were asking Arnold

himself; Arnold — well, that is, independent of the poor, waiting, invalid Arnold upstairs.

Philip fixed his eyes attentively on hers and said very gravely: —

"Yes, you must come up, as soon as you have finished your sherry."

His voice was full of childish decision. Lilla said nothing more, but after drinking the sherry followed him upstairs.

Philip led her towards the rear of the house, through an arched doorway to a small, intermediate chamber, fitted with cabinets and a writing-desk. He opened a door beyond and said, —

"Arnold is here in the library."

Lilla paused before a mirror, drew the dark veil again over her face, and entered.

The room was large, and was lighted chiefly from the top. A cheerful fire burned on the hearth, in front of which were a few old-fashioned chairs. A large table stood in the centre of the room, and the walls seemed to be covered with books. This general impression was all she got, for coming hastily across the room to meet her was Arnold himself, thin and pale, but after all not much changed, his grave eyes so fixedly upon her that she was thankful for her effectual disguise. What he said, whether or not they shook hands, and when Philip left, Lilla could not have told. She was given a chair near the fire, and then Robertson said with a quick smile and an undertone of determination: —

"You will take off your veil, I think."

Lilla shook her head.

"Excuse me," she said simply. "I will keep it on."

Robertson paused, as if not used to being opposed in his invalid's whims, but he did not dispute the point. He took his stand with his back to the corner of the mantelpiece. Lilla felt all through her own strong frame how weak he probably felt, and wished he would not stand; but she saw that that, as well as the finished nicety of his dress, was part of the bravado of a convalescent.

"I cannot well tell you how grateful I am," he began. "I had little reason to suppose you would come. Since the 22d of July, I have not till yesterday had the least word from you, and have heard very little about you. However, I have not the intention of complaining. All that lies in your hands."

A contented smile broke over his face as he said this, and he took a seat. Lilla drew a breath of relief.

"You have been very ill?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Not dangerously so, I believe, and the recovery is well worth it. When one is too long well, one becomes a little dragged with responsibility and activity. The peach-bloom of life, the surface enjoyment, gets rubbed off. Now I enjoy little things again. I have learned other lessons also. Strange to say, I feel less maudlin sympathy with other people's woes, especially their illnesses. I myself wanted care and kindness, but not sympathy. I preferred the reverse, indeed. There 's a distinc-

tion — is n't there ? — between wanting sympathy and wanting love; for I won't deny that I have been as soft-hearted as a maiden of sixteen, and begged for the softest words Mrs. Ainslie could give me."

"She was ready with them, I 've no doubt," said Lilla gently. "Tell me what are the little things you enjoy so much. You must open the eyes of us well people."

"They are not really little. It is wonderful to feel life and strength flowing back into one, and 'a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.' How often I 've quoted that to myself ! How can we call anything ugly that reflects the light of day? Every morning I lie awake at early dawn, and am simply intoxicated with pleasure to see the light grow. I feel so strong and well at that hour, ten times stronger than when I am really well. Then, now I understand so thoroughly the great pleasures of my fellow-men. How many of them are singing at their work in the morning sunlight! I think how hungry they are at noon, and there my sympathy is deep-felt, I assure you, for I am always ravenous. I think of their wives and children at home. Most people have meals when they 're hungry, or they would n't live at all. Most men have wives and children, and though there are shadows to the picture, it is the great joy hidden there that makes such shadows. Then there are the friendships, the touch of the hand and the look that send each off joyously to the day's work. For almost every man there is some one whom just to look at is pure blessedness."

"It is a lovely picture," said Lilla; "you must have a good deal of happiness within to see life in just that way."

There was silence for a few moments, then Lilla added, rousing herself: —

"I must warn you that I am not allowed to stay but a few minutes; perhaps five minutes more. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I am glad to know the limit, for I have one or two things I must say."

"Let us defer everything important," said Lilla persuasively. "To-day we are to do nothing but gossip. Is n't that pleasant enough for — for the first visit?"

Arnold sat silent a few minutes, leaning his head on his hand.

"It is n't quite enough," he said at last.

"If you wish me to come again, it must be."

Arnold was again silent.

"I suppose I should be more satisfied if I could look straight into your eyes, as I used to do. You can scarcely imagine how hidden you are with that veil, or how hard it is for me to be so punished."

"It must be so," said Lilla. His words did not soften her. It was too incomprehensible that he felt at liberty to speak in this way after his long silence

A flush came to Robertson's cheek, and at last he said with an effort: —

"I do not yet think what I have done to displease you. Possibly it is something I can explain. I cannot think my letter was insulting, though you

thought it unwise to answer it. It was no more than my actions had already said. I could not plunge into such an illness without saying something, and for a long time I hoped for an answer."

"But you never wrote," cried Lilla aghast.

"I sent you a penciled letter the day I was taken ill."

"I never received it."

Robertson staggered to his feet.

"My God, I never once thought of that. I had been so bold, that when I had no answer I thought you were offended. I thought I was the only one that suffered then. Since my delirium I fear I have no more secrets from Mrs. Ainslie. When that had passed, I persuaded myself that even if not offended you could not well answer till I was well enough to say all a man should say. At bottom I grieved over that. I was right, too. If you had known, I should not have lacked some touch of gentleness from the woman I love. And now it was you who suffered. My darling, how can I atone? How soon did you know I was ill?"

"Not till yesterday."

Robertson's face turned white, and some unintelligible cry burst from him.

"Do not take it in this way," said Lilla in alarm. "It was hard, but it is all over now. I must get Mrs. Ainslie. We understand each other at last, and you are not well enough to bear longer excitement."

"I am not well enough to bear longer separation."

Lilla trembled from head to foot under the look

Arnold bent on her, his eyes entreating forgiveness, his hands outstretched in invitation, and the smile of dawning happiness already on his lip. With slow and painful resolution she turned from him, and as if crushed down by a mighty weight moved towards the door.

"What is it, — what is it, Lilla? What has come between us? You are trying to spare me, but you are leaving me to torture unbearable. Have you learned to love some one else?"

Lilla turned towards him.

"Nothing that I can now do will spare you pain," she said hoarsely, "because I myself am so vile. Forgive me, if you ever can. I *am* engaged to be married."

She hurried to the door. A horror of great darkness had fallen on her, a loathing unutterable for herself. The only thing she could do for Arnold was to rid his house of her presence. With flying feet she passed through the corridors and at the foot of the stairs met Mrs. Ainslie. She tried to speak, but nothing but a groan escaped her, and in a few moments she was on the street.

That evening Gardiner had to attend a club dinner. He had promised Lilla to excuse himself early, and by half past nine he was at her door. As a rule he took great pains not to present himself with the scent of tobacco about him, but to-night he did not throw away his cigar till his carriage stopped at the door. Then he pulled closer the flowers in his buttonhole and smiled as he rang the bell.

"What will be her mood to-night?" he thought. "She has always some new way of robbing a man of his wits."

"Apparently a quiet one," was his further comment to himself, as he found her sitting silently by her fire. She had dressed for the evening according to her custom, and looked to him lovelier than ever. As he came near, she observed him closely, — the flowers, the gayety, the scent of the cigar, the slight color, as of a man who had dined well, his stoutness, his merry smile, the admiration in his eyes, — nothing was lost on her. With a few jocular words he bent towards her, and she, withdrawing herself slightly, gave him her hand. Then, as he continued to stand very near her, she rose and walked to the centre-table.

"What did you mean by giving me flowers that would not last till evening? Look at them."

"Ah, you must have given them too much attention. Cold water is better than petting, even for a lover's flowers."

This was not Gardiner's usual way of talking, and in a moment he added, following her to examine them: —

"Pale-hearted things they are, though, to faint under one day of it. Ah, here are the Vanderzees' cards. Were they here to-day?"

"Yes. I was out at the time."

Lilla turned back to her chair, which second forsaking of his neighborhood caused Gardiner to open his eyes in amazement. His look met hers, and he began to smile.

"Why do you fly ahead of me like that? Tell me my fault, and will I repent."

"I have not accused you of anything;" and Lilla took up the newspaper.

"Quarrel No. 10, is n't it, Lilla? You have n't really forgiven me for yesterday. You wanted to be a Sister of Mercy, and I was tyrannical and suspicious. Then to-day I went off to revel at the club, and you sat at home and thought of the poor invalid; and, altogether, I have turned into a perfect brute, and so get nothing but the cold shoulder. Fortunately, I admire even this view of you."

There was no answer.

"Well, what shall I do to regain my ground? What penance must I undergo? Shall I relent about Mr. Robertson, and send you as ministering angel to his bedside?"

Lilla's eyes flashed savagely.

"That is unnecessary. I have been to see Mr. Robertson."

There was a dead silence. Gardiner was standing in the most helpless astonishment; he thought he might not have heard correctly.

"You have" — he began stammeringly.

"I went to see Mr. Robertson this afternoon. I saw no reason for refusing so harmless a request."

"Did you not tell me you had written, declining?"

"So I had; I had also written, accepting."

"Then," said Jeffreys, his voice trembling, "you told me a deliberate lie."

"Yes," returned Lilla, coolly imitating his tone, "I told you a deliberate lie."

"Why?"

"If I had said I meant to go, you would have prevented me, would you not?"

"I should have done my best, certainly."

"Well, then," said Lilla briefly and significantly.

"And you saw no reason why you should not disregard my wishes?"

"It was not a matter for you to decide."

There was another silence.

"Lilla," began Gardiner, deeply troubled, "you may imagine that you can carry the matter off with this cruel and high-handed defiance, but you have quite mistaken the man with whom you have to deal. I have not become so weak as that. I should see nothing worth caring for in a woman who could persistently oppose me on such a ground as this. This is *just* the sort of matter I should decide. It is not despotic in me to say so. And as for your pleading such an excuse for deceiving me, it can only be the madness of a moment that could suggest it to you."

Lilla turned her newspaper, as if she were finishing a paragraph, and Jeffreys, losing all patience, took it from her hands.

"Well," said Lilla. "I am a liar, you said. What else is there?"

"Good God, what have I done that you should be so much changed? Am I going mad, or are you? Are you trying to break with me?"

"No," said Lilla drearily, "I am not trying to break with you. Poverty and disgrace are not so pleasant to me as that."

Jeffreys stood speechless. Once in a long time she said that sort of thing, and each time it seemed impossible to forgive it. It was her way when she was angry, and so far he had been patient with it, possibly too patient. At some favorable moment he would show her the insanity of such language. Just now he would ignore it. So he decided, half-conscious of his own powerlessness, and at last said calmly: —

"Why, then, do you make it impossible for me to go on with my part of it?"

"Is it impossible? I do not see it. Have I ever promised to obey you? You asked me to call myself engaged to you. I did so and went further. I fixed January 22 for the wedding-day. Does this give you a right to issue orders to me? You would not have said so four weeks ago. Nothing was then said of my being your subordinate."

"This is mere pretense," said Jeffreys hotly. "I don't intend to argue a point like this. My wife may disagree with me, may contradict me, may reason with me, but she is never to disobey me; and an engagement is not the last moment of a woman's freedom, but the first of her obligation. No woman, even, can think an opposite state of things desirable."

He waited for an answer. Lilla, having no newspaper to handle, folded her hands and looked doggedly at the fire.

"You do not need convincing," went on Gardiner in a more gentle voice. "Your instinct would be quicker than mine to tell you all this. The trouble

is elsewhere, and I think that time is just now the best remedy. To-morrow morning, or to-morrow afternoon, rather, we may find ourselves agreeing better. Now I had better say good-night."

Jeffreys left the room. His temper was so much roused that he felt it was safer for his own interests to take time to consider. He had hardly reached the stairs, however, when he turned back, wishing to fix a definite hour for his next visit. Brief as had been his absence, Lilla had vanished. He stared bewildered at the empty chair and went a few steps forward. Then he saw her crouching on the floor.

"Lilla," he cried, "are you ill?"

Lilla started to her feet, and turned on him a face stamped with abject misery. She had now betrayed herself beyond remedy, and she continued to face him silently, almost, as he thought, stupidly.

"What is it?" asked Gardiner in a voice scarcely audible. Then he went on more clearly. "Tell me about Mr. Robertson. Is he the cause of all this?"

Lilla made no sign.

"Did you tell him of your engagement?" went on Gardiner. "You did? That is more than I expected. Still you added, of course, that your heart had always been his, that you did not know he had been ill, that you" —

Gardiner's voice became choked, and he stopped.

Lilla uttered a short cry, and flung herself on the chair she had left.

"You have, then, lied to me from the beginning. You told me you loved no one else."

"I don't, I don't. You are mistaken," said Lilla, between short breaths. "You don't understand."

"Oh, I don't! I 'm afraid I do."

"You don't," insisted Lilla. "I! love him! I would not so much insult him. I am unclean — vile — oh!" and she stretched out both hands and shuddered through all her body.

Jeffreys stood watching her intently.

"Oh," he said at last. "I see. It was a weak moment, then, when he sent for you to come to his bedside. But no, a saint does not need to think of petty proprieties when his fair penitent is in need of spiritual guidance. He would not even know, of course, whether she were fair or ugly."

Lilla moaned, but made no answer.

"When is your next appointment?"

"I shall never see him again."

"Never! — till you are well married, I suppose. That was prudent of Robertson. He knows I could not stand too much of this. But when you are married, with the liberal settlement Meredith so kindly suggested in your behalf, why, then we shall see."

Lilla lifted her eyes to his for the first time. Her look was too sullen and wretched to be called proud, but at least it did not shrink from his.

"I have told you the facts, which you do not and need not believe. I have, however, nothing else to say, and must ask you not to insult me when there is nothing to be got by it."

"There are suggestions, then, which you still find insulting. It is so difficult for me to tell. I thought

it was your own avowed plan to marry me to get rid of poverty and disgrace."

"I did say so, but I take it back. I can never be rid of my disgrace, and poverty does not matter. I believe I thought for the moment I could make your misery less that way, but I see it is impossible. Curse me, and let me go, and no one shall ever hear of me again."

Gardiner stood in amazed silence. In spite of himself, he believed in her sincerity. Her self-hatred and despair left unmistakable marks. Many thoughts rushed through his mind, for the moment was critical. When he spoke at last, his decision astonished himself.

"You have given me your word, you remember, for January 22."

Lilla started, and uttered a faint assent.

"Very well. I hold you to it. *I hold you to it.* Will you remember that?"

"Yes," said Lilla more faintly still.

"I must go now and think matters over. You have cut me too near the heart for me to think clearly here and now. When I have decided on my course, I will come and tell you. Meanwhile, you are bound by your word. To keep that is the one act of virtue still open to you. Do you understand?"

"Think of it, Jeffreys. Do you want a wife without self-respect? one that can never, never love you? who marries you because she has so promised?"

Gardiner was already too pale to show emotion at this pitiless statement. He answered resolutely, "I

am going to think of it, but meanwhile you are my promised wife. You have never promised yourself to any one else, and you have promised yourself to me. Your self-respect must begin at this point, if anywhere."

When Gardiner had really gone, it was something of a relief. He had so little to do with her own inward tragedy that his presence, his words, and the wrongs of which he made so much, were all an intrusion hard to endure. During the night she lay with her eyes wide open. Now at last she felt the four weeks of her engagement as a shameful brand which only death could remove. The air itself seemed loaded with heavy exhalations, as if her vileness spread itself abroad, so that she could not draw one free breath. As far back into her life as she chose to look, she could find nothing but vanity and self-seeking, and now they had borne their fruit in this defilement.

She began to long for some deep, pure river where she might hide her wretched self. There was a beauty in this idea. What Arnold had once cared for was in a way sacred, and must go into the pure water never to be seen again. The thought pleased her more and more. Arnold would hear of it, and would understand. What?

"Not that," she cried. "I told the truth about that. I don't love him, but if I were once dead and rid of myself, then I would love him. He would understand that."

Across these fancies came the picture of Arnold as she had last seen him, boyish, beseeching, holding

out his hands to her. He had needed her, had suffered without her, was now ill and sorrowful, and she could not —

The sharp point of her wrong-doing had at last pierced her. She covered her face and lay motionless.

Sunday morning dawned bright and crisp. Lilla stood silently by her untasted breakfast. On Sunday Gardiner often went to his office for quiet work, but to-day he would very probably come to renew the painful scenes of the night before. She wished, oh, so deeply, that she could break away from it all, but she had not the force. In the night she might dream of faithfulness, of hopeless love, and atoning death, but the day always brings its own ways of thinking.

Verily, God veils himself in light more than in darkness. The day sets up its own little light, its standards, its self-confidence, and immediately the world becomes small and shut in, and the invisible has ceased to be. Her anguish is not a thing accomplished. It must now perpetuate itself in new deeds and new sufferings. She cannot kill herself. She cannot disobey Jeffreys. She must go on yielding still to circumstances and earning fresh torment thereby.

How long she stood thinking she did not know. When she heard Gardiner downstairs she raised her coffee and drank it. It was already cold.

If Lilla could have given a thought to misery outside of her own, she would have been struck with the change a night had made in Gardiner. Over

and over had he fought the battle between his self-respect and his imperious love. The latter had conquered, and he came to her abject and despairing, at heart if not on the exterior.

He smiled drearily as he saw her gloomy face.

"We are spoiling all the sunshine between us," he said. "The play on the boards is a tragedy, and the puppets must therefore weep. I am afraid you ate little breakfast, Lilla. Won't you try to eat more?"

Lilla shook her head.

"I have n't much to say," Gardiner went on, "though I 've thought all night long. I am going down to the office, and if there is anything I can do for you, I shall be very glad. I do want to say that I came into your presence like a brute last night, from my wine and my cigar. I owe you an apology for that, and I suppose for many other things I have n't the grace to remember."

He stood a few moments in silence, then turned to go away. Lilla interposed.

"Must we keep this up, Jeffreys?"

"This what?" asked Gardiner, though he knew too well.

"This farce of being engaged."

Even under the expected blow Gardiner writhed.

"Oh, Lilla, have you no mercy? I ask for so little, but I do want a little. I cannot live now without you. I should die if I went back to my lonely life. It is a farce, as you say, if there is no kindness at all in your heart for me. There must be some. There was a time, I know, when you had a

little liking for me. Will you not go back to that, and let me try to win my way again?"

Jeffreys stopped in despair. He looked at Lilla standing motionless as a beautiful statue, and knew that he had no chance of winning his way again.

"What could you do, if you were left alone?"

He put the question as if it were unanswerable.

"I would hide myself away forever."

"Now think, dear," went on Jeffreys, driven to arguments that were most distasteful to him, "think how free and how honored you will be as my wife. You will be rich too. You will have an independent income, for which you need account to no one. There will be nothing you cannot do. You know so much about beautiful things; you can buy them freely. You can travel. You can do a great deal of good, if you like. You can help on institutions of charities, — found them, too, if you wish. There is nothing I would not do at any time to win a smile from you. Just now I would give my heart and soul for one gentle look."

Lilla turned her face away and felt for a chair. Jeffreys hastened to give her one, and then went on still more seriously: —

"I am not blind, dear, and I know that you feel a lack in me. I don't fit in well with your ideas of duty and religion. Women are terribly sharp to see such things. I own myself guilty, but I am ready to learn. You have made me better already, as you must know. I will try to learn more still."

"Why do you talk?" broke in Lilla suddenly. "I wish you would go, Jeffreys. You know before-

hand that I will do as you decide to have me. What we have suffered already is nothing to what we shall suffer. Misery and nothing but misery will come of it. But for God's sake, don't talk any more. That 's a woman's trick."

There was a note of petty vexation in her voice, but Gardiner went on gently: —

"I may at least have the hope of better things than that. Naturally, you cannot understand what a conscience a woman's eyes may be to a man. I was thinking of that last night. You, my darling, would be my guiding star. If you loved me, there is nothing, not any spiritual insight, to which you could not lead me."

A flash of indignation broke from Lilla's eyes. Some chord had been struck at last that roused her into speech.

"You told me once that a husband should lead his wife and not the wife her husband. But this is what you men do all up and down this land. You claim to lead us in all paths, and forsake us in the one hardest to climb. You laugh at the women crowding the churches alone, and you say they will always follow a priest, but you have no light for them. You say to your mother or your sister that you honor and love them, that their religion is lovely, and yet they still have to walk that path alone in tears and weakness. If man is the stronger, he should show it here, but where now are the Pauls and Johns? In this accursed nineteenth century to find God is the woman's burden. Men have business more important. But it will not last, Jeffreys.

If most men do as you do, most women will go as I go, into utter darkness."

A long silence followed. Lilla waited for an answer, but hearing none she sank back in her chair and twisted her fingers together nervously. When Jeffreys at last spoke, it was in a dry, quiet voice.

"This is not the time to enter on such arguments. There is much, of course, in what you say, but there is also much to be said of a different kind. We will not, however, drag such matters out in detail. You are certainly not in condition for them. The questions before you are far simpler, — questions of consideration for others and loyalty to your word. It is only confusing issues to talk as you have done. But, as you said yourself, we make too many words over all this. Let us forget the whole matter for a few days and then decide. This afternoon I will, if you like, have out my phaeton, and take you for a short drive. Would you like that?"

"I can't go out," said Lilla.

"Then, — well, then," said Jeffreys, his face clouding over, "I will come to see you here."

If Lilla by her accusations had not succeeded in impressing Gardiner, she had at least made her own feelings clearer to herself and inspired herself with the thought of rebellion against his claims. A certain project was forming itself in her mind, and however desperate and hopeless it was, it for the moment lessened her misery to have some plan to think out. She gave a good deal of thought to its details, and then began to put it in execution.

She called her maid and had her trunks packed.

Not only her clothing, but her books and papers and all her small belongings were put away. Then she saw Miss Purdie, her landlady, and announced her intention of leaving that very day. Miss Purdie exacted increased payment, because of lack of notice, and Lilla paid submissively all her demands, asking to have her trunks stored for a time. She next dismissed and paid her maid. At last, immediately after lunch, she ordered a carriage and had one trunk put up behind. She left a note to be given to Gardiner when he should come in the afternoon. Then, with a fearful glance down the street, though it was much too early for him to appear, she stepped into the carriage and was driven away.

This was the note that Gardiner found awaiting him in the afternoon: —

November 3.

You said there was one goodness left to me, that of keeping my word. Now I am losing that. I cannot help it. For a time, while I was stupefied, I thought I could go on with my promise, if you cared to have me; but I can't. I should go wild.

You need not ever think of me again. You will never hear of me. I am wicked. I am too wicked to live any more, but I am not brave enough to die. You must not hunt for me. If you do, you will not find me alive.

Miss Purdie has a package for you, containing all I have that is yours. Some day I may be able to return the money you lent me. LILLA.

CHAPTER XXI.

MRS. MEREDITH was standing by her window late one very rainy afternoon, waiting for Robertson, whom she had asked to come and see her. It was now some weeks since Lilla's disappearance; after the first efforts to trace her had failed, her friends had not known what to do next, and Mrs. Meredith had not seen Robertson for a week or more. The latter had not spoken to any one of Lilla's visit to him, but Mrs. Meredith, even without this clue, had reverted at once to her original belief that it was for him Lilla really cared. She had so far failed to discover whether Robertson himself understood this or not.

When Lilla's flight first became known, it was Mrs. Meredith who took the initiative. Her husband wrote for her to Gardiner, asking if he could be of any service. Gardiner replied that, as the engagement had been broken, he felt unable to take any action. Mrs. Meredith was so far from satisfied that, in spite of this rebuff, her husband followed up his letter in person, when Gardiner told him stiffly that he had absolutely no knowledge of Miss Wilton's whereabouts, and preferred not to discuss the matter.

Then she had turned to Robertson, and he, though still weak from his illness, had at once taken

every measure that suggested itself to discover Lilla's hiding-place, but though they found the hackman who had taken her away, they could trace her no farther than the house where he had taken her, at which place a man had called the same day for her and for her trunk.

Though all had been done that Mrs. Meredith could suggest, she felt anxious and uneasy. She was puzzled by the attitude of both of the men who should be interested in the matter. Gardiner would do nothing at all. Robertson appeared to act only at her request, and was, even to her, grave and reserved.

When he came at last, Mrs. Meredith inquired anxiously as to what was being done.

"I hope they are still watching at the banker's," she said. "She must go there or send there before many days."

"Yes, the detectives have that in hand and also are watching at Davids' money loan office. I am in communication with Mrs. Miller, Mrs. Kelway, Mr. Willcox, indeed all her friends, and should be informed at once of any news. Elsa cannot be found at all. Perhaps they are together. You have seen, of course, that we did put in the papers the direct appeal you suggested."

"What is your theory, Mr. Robertson? Why should she break her engagement?"

Arnold hesitated.

"I suppose I may speak frankly," he said at last, "as we both have a sincere regard for her. Her past life has been at times erratic and unconven-

tional. I suppose that something of that nature came to Mr. Gardiner's knowledge, and that he broke off the engagement. Then Miss Wilton may have been unwilling to meet her friends and may either have gone West where I understand she has family connections, or posssibly she and Elsa have returned to Europe. I wish I could believe that Elsa *is* with her. It was a man, however, who came to get her and her trunk, — perhaps an expressman."

"Do you think that she really cared for this Mr. Gardiner?"

Arnold's face changed painfully.

"Why else should she have become engaged to him?"

"I suppose she was in straits for money."

"Well, I know," said Arnold, breathing shortly and speaking as if to himself.

"And she struggled against it till the last moment!"

"How did she struggle against it?"

"I thought perhaps you did n't know. Go and get Mrs. Willcox to tell you about Lilla's call on them the evening before her engagement was announced."

Arnold kept his eyes fixed on her, but said nothing.

"I don't know exactly what passed," went on Mrs. Meredith, "but I know she asked them to help her."

"And they would not?"

"They were completely mystified, and before they could come to any understanding, she decided

to announce her engagement and showed them her engagement ring."

"For four months she thought I had forgotten her."

Arnold spoke still as if communing with himself alone. It was the first time he had betrayed his suffering in his face or words, and Mrs. Meredith, though pitying him, could not but be relieved at this renewal of confidence. She now remained silent while his mind worked painfully through thoughts both new and old. When he at last looked again towards her she said gently: —

"She loves you; of that at least I am sure. If you do not believe it, go and ask the Willcoxes to tell you what Mrs. Willcox told me."

Thanksgiving Day was approaching. Both Willcox and his wife by their New England training were of one mind as to the necessity of having a Thanksgiving dinner. Also they had both been long enough wanderers to understand the desolateness of solitary memorial days, so they had decided to forego the strictly family aspect of the celebration and gather together some of their friends who were still homeless. They invited several from Mrs. Miller's boarding-house, among these a newly married couple just established there. Bessie felt much sympathy for Mrs. Spooner's new experiences, with two rooms only for all her household gods, and a little slim husband in the wood and coal business.

Miss Granger was, of course, coming too, but, strange to say, Bessie had had to work hard to secure her acceptance.

It was difficult indeed to keep their friendship at its old affectionate level. Bessie felt that she was not met half way. She had made a point of seeing her friend at frequent intervals, and had tried in every way to make her a sharer in her new happiness. Miss Granger had not made it easy, indeed often appeared oppressed by the glow of content which nowadays radiated from every part of Bessie's little person.

And yet Miss Granger had struggled hard not to allow her own loss and loneliness to avenge itself on Bessie and overshadow her very justifiable happiness; and if this marriage had had about it any of the dignity, the calm, serene blessedness of old-time lovers, whose stories were part of her favorite reading, she would have been not only resigned but happy. Every attempt at such idealization was met by blow upon blow, as the pettiness of modern married life revealed itself. There must be trivial details, there must be sicknesses and economies, and even Folko and Gabrielle, that fictitious but exquisite pair of married lovers, must have had to learn each other's habits and weaknesses; but nowadays, apparently, these things instead of being lived down were lived in, they were obtruded upon any friend unfortunate enough to be counted near and dear, and the two lovers, who separately had had the privilege of occasional solitude, and of ignoring at will the more obtrusive sides of existence, were now entangled in a partnership chiefly devoted to such matters, and were not able to keep its affairs even within this double privacy.

Bessie felt without understanding her friend's attitude and, the evening before Thanksgiving, as she and her husband sat by their fire, she told him with some sadness of this estrangement. No sadnesses, however, lasted long with her at this time, and to-day she had a particularly good joke on hand, having found in an old coat of her husband's the glove which she had dropped for him to pick up the Sunday before her engagement.

"By the way, dear boy," she began, coming and standing behind his chair, "it 's a delicate thing to mention, but you have never returned me something I lent you."

She touched his hair gently as she spoke, and to Willcox the touch was enchantment.

"Was it your heart?" he asked.

"Oh, nonsense, Jim. You never asked for my heart. You never got further than my hand. In fact, — you were very humble then, — I think it was my glove, was n't it?"

"It was n't the mitten, I know."

"I did n't say that. But don't you remember, — that Sunday, — on Miss Granger's doorstep? I would n't mention it, of course, Jim, if you could ever have any use for it; but, dear me, what number *do* you wear?"

"Do you mean you want it back?"

"If you prefer giving me a two dollar bill, it will answer the same purpose."

"What a heartless woman you are, Bessie, to put things in that way! Why, do you know what I did with that darling little glove?"

"What?" asked Bessie innocently.

Willcox started to his feet and moved about the room, recalling all the sweetness of that day.

"I don't know, Bessie, what most married men would do. Perhaps I 'm foolish, but I can't give it up. It 's about the only thing of mine that is n't at your disposal. You know, whatever may happen in the future, those past days are mine forever. You don't mind, do you?"

"Oh, I 'll steal it some day," said Bessie carelessly moving away. "Where do you keep it? I don't believe you have it yourself, you wretch. You 're a fraud."

"Indeed I have, Bessie," ejaculated Willcox with great indignation. "I don't fool on such matters."

"Where?"

"I cannot say in just what place, but you may be sure it is treasured and worshiped somewhere."

"Oh, you humbug!" said Bessie in a changed tone. "Treasured and worshiped indeed! Look at it. Hattie gave it to me out of the pocket of the coat you gave away."

"It was n't there," cried Willcox.

"Indeed it was, you hypocrite, and the penalty is that I shall keep it now. Oh, you need n't beg. I don't give such favors twice."

Bessie swept by him with affected haughtiness, much amused at the completeness of his stupefaction. She moved to the door in instant expectation of his restraining hand, when he should have appreciated the joke, for the two were often young-hearted enough to play like children. This time,

however, she had to stop of her own free will and turn towards him.

"It does n't look right," said Willcox humbly, as her eyes met his, "and there is nothing I can say; but I would have died before I would have done that knowingly, and now I have no right to ask for it."

He turned away abruptly, and Bessie was hastening after him with a little wry face, for she saw that at this crisis sentiment was inevitable, when the door was thrown open, and Mr. Robertson was announced.

At Arnold's previous visit, he had not seen Mrs. Willcox, and at first she scarcely remembered his face, but before her husband could present him, she called him by name.

Robertson introduced his business with some abruptness. He had come, he said, to ask for more detailed information in regard to Miss Wilton's indebtedness. Willcox was able to produce a written memorandum of it.

"This is serious," said Arnold, after he had examined the paper. "Do you think she is hiding because of these debts?"

Willcox hesitated, and his wife answered for him.

"Probably not."

"Why not?" asked Arnold, fixing his eyes on her.

"She has been in debt too long to care very deeply about it."

"What is your theory about her?"

"I think she is hiding in New York. Possibly a Mr. Raynor may know of her."

"Do you know anything of Howard Raynor?"

said Robertson, his mind traveling suddenly back on this new line of association.

"I have seen him."

Bessie had secretly no doubt that it was he whom Miss Wilton had met in the Newport woods.

As Arnold insisted on knowing more, Bessie related briefly the story of that afternoon. She tried to make no comment of her own, but she evidently thought of it as a piece of unworthy flirtation. She also knew that in New York Lilla continued to see him.

"I am told," said Robertson, when she had finished, "that Miss Wilton came to see you on the evening of the day of her engagement."

Bessie flushed, and said uneasily: —

"Yes. Did not Mr. Willcox tell you? I scarcely think it is important."

"On the contrary."

"Jim, will you tell?" said Bessie.

Willcox's narration was frank and uncompromising. He told of Lilla's great distress of mind, how she had appealed for guidance and help rather than money; to save her, as she said, from a great misery. In the light of Lilla's present flight, the story bore a new significance even to Willcox himself. His wife was looking at him, struck with awe, but he went on pitilessly with the story of her tears, her appeals, her promises of economy. When he came at last to his wife's reply and accusations, he hesitated, and spoke instead of the doubts they both naturally felt as to the strength of her good resolutions. Then he told of the accidental discovery of

her engagement-ring, and how after that Miss Wilton had announced her engagement, and how she had refused all subsequent offers of help.

Bessie worked her hands nervously till the recital was ended, then as Robertson rose she lifted her eyes to his face. She meant to say a few words to put the matter in a more favorable light, but something in his rigid expression kept her silent, and he soon took his leave. When he had fairly gone, her agitation rose beyond her control. She burst into a flood of tears and threw herself into her husband's arms.

"I don't like him," she cried. "I don't like him at all. He 's very cruel and hard. Do you think I am so wicked, Jim? If you had only known it in time! I 'm sure Miss Wilton never would have given *me* money, not even if she owed it to me. I don't suppose you want my glove now any more."

Bessie broke into a hysterical laugh, and, without lifting her head from her husband's shoulder, managed to find the glove and hide it in his breast-pocket.

"Am I wicked, Jim? Kiss me again if I 'm not. You know if I was hard to her, it was really your fault. She used to try to take possession of you, and I wanted you all to myself, my dear, dear boy."

Robertson returned home, and locked himself into his room. Up to this time he had deliberately drilled himself into a false belief. At first he had had no distinct reason for believing that Lilla's engagement had not been one of inclination. How-

ever much she had pitied him on the day of her visit, however disturbed she herself had been, she had uttered no word of repenting. He felt, indeed, that, had his letter not been so mysteriously lost, he might have kept his hold on her, and the result might have been different; but the more he thought over her actual position, the less he could blame her, it being difficult for a lover reasoning in solitude with the verdict already against him to be otherwise than humble as to his deserts. So well had he schooled himself that even when, some days after the event, he heard of her break with Gardiner, he still thought of it as a misunderstanding between lovers, and therefore as holding only very distant possibilities for himself.

It was but lately that he had come to appreciate the fact that the day of Lilla's flight was the day after her visit to him. Possibly, then, Gardiner had taken this visit as the immediate pretext for a breach. He still had believed that Gardiner's sullenness hid a secret knowledge of her hiding-place, and that his own efforts were wholly uncalled for.

Now a new view of the matter was dawning upon him. She had fought against this engagement. It was she who had broken it, sharply, at her first knowledge of his faithfulness. Gardiner knew no more of her than he had said. She had broken her chains, and now watched that he should follow and find her. Perhaps not quite that. Her words of self-accusation and self-loathing were too fresh in his memory to allow him to believe that, but she was free to be won.

A knock at the door disturbed his reflections; it was the servant announcing dinner. Arnold felt as if he had just eaten a hearty meal, and pausing in his restless walk, he said: —

"I am going out, James. I won't take any dinner."

The man went off, but soon returned to knock again. Arnold refused to open, being more inclined to kick the door down, but he faced his invisible tormentor and asked what was the matter.

"Mrs. Ainslie is out, sir, to-night, and told me to be sure you ate your dinner while it was hot."

Robertson flung open the door and expressed his mind rather freely, but James, who was keen enough to see that there was more suffering than malice in this unusual outburst, went off undisturbed.

What could he do to-night? This was the impatient question Arnold asked of himself, as he was again left alone. The only clue he now had was Mrs. Willcox's suggestion of the Raynors. At the time, that had seemed worth following, but now, under the influence of his new belief, he felt sure that Lilla would choose some more respectable refuge, perhaps even would seek for some employment and be for a time independent of her allowance. Her indebtedness seemed to him very large, for Gardiner had revealed to no one that he had assumed so considerable a part of it.

But then she might be in distress. Employment was not always found at will, and her mind must have been overshadowed by all that had happened. How long was it? Three weeks and three days she

had been homeless. His routine search seemed now a heartless form. Like a paid detective, he had done his day's work and gone to quiet sleep. Where was *she* sleeping?

"Something, I must do!" he cried.

The Raynors were, at least, his most hopeful clue. Of Mrs. Raynor he had unusual means of knowledge. He had known her first about eighteen months earlier, at a time when she was in great want. She had made no secret of her situation as a deserted wife, and talked violently and bitterly. He had lost sight of her for a year or more, and had found her again in the same struggling circumstances. She was different from most women engaged in her work. She had had some education and showed great natural acuteness, but she was thoroughly embittered, and when roused did not hesitate to arraign for injustice God as well as man. In the spring she had learned Miss Wilton's name, and began at once in the insane jealousy of her thoughts to hurl abuse at her also. Full of pity for such darkness, Arnold had contrived to see her more than once, to gain if he could a hold on her restless and miserable soul. She did listen to him, and he had read and talked with her a great deal. When he returned from Staten Island, it was she whom he had visited, though already shivering with the chill which preceded his fever and which a ride in the Park had not thrown off. She had certainly changed, but he did not take the credit of it all. Much was due to her husband's more frequent appearances at home. It was highly improbable that she would know anything of Miss Wilton,

but there was a possibility that Howard might, and, with a sense of relief at reaching a decision, he rang the bell and ordered a carriage. The lateness of the hour was an advantage, for he would be the more likely to meet Howard himself.

While Robertson stood by the window waiting, Mrs. Ainslie, who had returned from her outing, came courageously in with a tray in her hands, and said in a sharp, high-pitched voice, which in reality covered some trepidation: —

"Mr. Arnold, you will please sit down at once and eat your meat, and some pudding is coming too. I will watch, and will tell you the moment the carriage comes."

Robertson smiled, and took his seat obediently. Mrs. Ainslie stood silently by the window, and with a heroism difficult to estimate, announced the carriage just as the pudding was brought in. Arnold had heard it himself also, and rose at once.

"Excuse me, Martie," he said, looking rather sadly at her. "If you were giving this care to her, I should know better how to be grateful."

Mrs. Raynor was living in two little rooms on the third floor of a large tenement house. She could not long find employment as a model, and now went out by the day to do washing. She was not accustomed to such heavy work or long hours, and had not acknowledged to her husband what she was doing, though from his lack of questioning on the subject she supposed he knew.

As Arnold stood on a dark landing and knocked, he heard inside the cheerful crackling of a fire, but

there was no sound of voices; presently Mrs. Raynor opened to him, disclosing a clean and well-lit kitchen, which held as central feature a new and highly-polished patent cooking-stove.

Mrs. Raynor's face was still handsome, in spite of marks of sadness. Her black hair rose in soft fullness from her face, her eyes were dark and haunting, and her sensitive mouth seemed to preserve in its lines the memory of many thoughts. Her hands showed the signs of hard work, and her dress was ill-fitting and collarless, yet she carried herself with real distinction. She smiled at the sight of her visitor, and placed a chair for him.

Robertson took his seat, with a mental tribute to the true beauty of a neat kitchen, which indeed is close to the hearts of many people, whether because of the nearness of a homely past, when ornaments and upholstery were not, or from the universally pleasing associations of the saucepan and the oven.

"That 's a wonderful object," he said, with his eyes on the glittering stove.

"Yes," said Mrs. Raynor. Then she added, after a few moments' pause: "Howard bought that for me. He has regular work just now, Mr. Robertson. He works for Mr. Gordon on Park Avenue, an old gentleman."

"What does he do for him?" asked Arnold, who knew Mr. Gordon.

"He does errands for him, and goes about with him to see that he does n't fall down. Howard is really much attached to him. Howard was here just now; he went out to get something."

"He lives here, then?"

"No," said Mrs. Raynor, with a queer look. "He does n't. I don't even know where he lives. He comes to see me occasionally, much as he did before we were married, only now he is bashful, and then he never was. You may well look puzzled, Mr. Robertson. He does really make ceremonious calls on me, and occasionally gives me a little money, but he won't stand any questioning. I think he 's taken it into his head to do his courting over again, and if I am in the least too forward, he may disappear for a fortnight. He always was different from anybody else, and I used to think it was because he was hiding things from me, and I treated him dreadfully. Then, as you know, he left me altogether. But the moment I change, he comes back. He 's nothing but a foolish boy, and though I gave him every chance to be bad, he is n't bad. He does n't drink; I mean not as men do. He does n't go to low places. I know he does n't. He does n't do anything but gamble. It 's quite wonderful to see him at his cards. He 's been showing me tricks to-night. He can shuffle a pack over and over and cut a Jack every time running. He 'll be coming soon. I 'll give him a light."

Mrs. Raynor rose and opened the door. Then as if this had been an excuse to remove herself from Robertson's sight, she stood behind his chair and said hesitatingly: —

"I want to tell you, Mr. Robertson, that it is to you I owe my husband's return. I read every day some of those places you marked, or others which

I find myself. I found one that describes just what has happened to me since July, — about taking out a stony heart and giving instead a heart of flesh. I was cruel to him before, and myself — I was nearly crazy. Now I see light ahead, and in the darkness even, I am not alone."

Arnold sat in silence and awe; so seldom is it given to one to see the growth from seed one's self has sown. A few months before she had been a rebellious and reckless woman, half-starved and neglected, and now her circumstances would have been the same, except for the change within.

During the stillness which followed her words, approaching steps were heard, and Arnold's thoughts suddenly leaped back to their old channels. He had no hope of gaining voluntary information from Howard Raynor, but he thought he might judge from his attitude towards himself whether or not he had something to hide. If there were the least confirmation of Mrs. Willcox's suspicion that Raynor knew Lilla's whereabouts, he would set to watch him men better skilled than himself in detective work.

"Here you are, Milly," called a cheerful voice from the stairway. "If it were n't so hot, it might n't have got so far. I 've hung the milk around my neck."

Here Howard appeared, a mug in either hand, and a quart measure hanging from his neck. As he passed the doorway, he saw Arnold and stopped short.

"Mr. Robertson," said his wife; "a gentleman who has helped me to get work."

Howard put down the mugs slowly, and turned his back to his wife.

"Untie the milk, will you? Thank you. Mr. Robertson will excuse me, but it is somewhat of a surprise to see him at this hour of the evening."

"It is the hour when I may expect to find you both at home," returned Robertson.

"Yes, of course, and you are one of Mrs. Raynor's friends. May I offer you a mug of homely liquid, less offensive to your palate, perhaps, than its name might be to your ears?"

"If it is hot, it will cover many sins," said Robertson.

"Ah, that 's well said," said Howard with less of constraint. "I will get another for myself."

"Don't be absurd," said his wife aside to him. "You know I don't want it. I told you so beforehand."

Howard sat down, disappointed. One avenue of escape had apparently been blocked. Robertson asked him about Mr. Gordon, but Howard was not communicative or at ease. When the mugs were emptied, he rose with alacrity and announced his own departure, looking furtively as he spoke at Robertson, as if he thought the handcuffs would now make their appearance. The latter, however, sufficiently convinced for his own purposes, returned his farewell, and sat without lifting his eyes.

Raynor went part way down the stairs, and then called his wife to him.

"He *may* have come without a policeman," he said softly. "I can't see any waiting on the street.

But, Milly, if I never reappear, think of me kindly, and know it is your thirsty friend who has locked me up."

"Nonsense, Howard," returned Mrs. Raynor. "If you don't reappear, I shall know it's something very different."

"Your hand is rough," continued Howard, holding it, and looking at her with almost childish vexation. "I wish he would n't get you rough work like that."

Mrs. Raynor looked involuntarily at the white, smooth hand that held her own, but made no answer, and Howard suddenly wheeled himself about and went whistling down the stairs.

CHAPTER XXII.

On one of the short afternoons of early December, Howard Raynor came out of the back entrance of his employer's house with a large package under his arm. It was about half past three, but the overcast sky and chilly air already anticipated the early nightfall. He buttoned his thin coat closely together, and looked ruefully at his bundle.

"If the old gentleman had more of a figure, I 'd wear it till I got there," he murmured to himself. "He came near giving me his son's, I 'll be bound, only I made such a fool of myself trying to tell him how I spent my wages. I 'm too simple for the old codger, and that 's a fact. He 'll be playing off a tract on to me at Christmas, if I don't look sharp. Hollo, I 've seen that young one before."

Howard's soliloquies were cut short by discovering a young man in a brown overcoat coming towards him from a side street.

"Another coat but the same face, I 'll be bound," continued Howard, but no longer audibly. "Here 's a lark. I 'd take him on a fine spin, if I had the time. I wonder where he ragged his coat. I 'll ask him."

Howard apparently thought better of this, for he stopped suddenly on a street corner till the stranger had passed him, then turned quickly at right angles

and, instead of making a second corner, entered a stable where he was acquainted. He soon had the satisfaction of seeing the stranger hurry past the door, but unfortunately not beyond the next street. There he stood immovably at the corner, and at last lit a pipe. Howard did not care to explain the situation to his acquaintances, and soon strolled out again towards Third Avenue. The stranger followed him at first, but even before he reached the avenue disappeared.

Howard was thoroughly uncomfortable, and took the elevated road, thinking it best, contrary to his first intention, to do at once his employer's errand at the tailor's. He could not detect any further spying, but he, nevertheless, took great precautions. He left the tailor's by a side door and ran in and out of sundry small streets. At length, seeing no one near, he took an uptown horsecar.

By the time it was wholly dark he found himself again in the neighborhood of Mr. Gordon's. He now went on beyond till he entered a street of very different aspect. He stopped at a house on the right. The door was ajar. The bell-handle was hanging out loosely, as if the last ringer had been a man of fierce disposition. The stairs and entries were unswept, being apparently no more private property than the streets without. The only light came from chinks in the doors, except for a faint glimmer from the street.

Raynor paid little attention to these well-known surroundings; he ran easily up three flights of stairs, and paused before the door of the rear room. Here

was no light, but he knocked at once and then with his finger-nails added a light tattoo of his own composition.

The door was quickly opened, and Howard entered and locked it behind him.

"This *is* economy," he said, scarcely distinguishing the figure before him, yet, nevertheless, taking off his hat.

"I will light up," was the answer, and in a few moments the lamp disclosed the face of Miss Wilton. To one less accustomed to the sight than Howard, the change of surroundings would have seemed nothing to the frightful change in herself. Apparently the time of grief had passed, and also that of reflection and determination. What was there now was simple torpor, — lack of feeling rather than sorrow. The slight show of pleasure which Howard's arrival called out was painfully like the gratitude of a dog at an unexpected caress. Although the dim, yellow light was merciful to the neglectfulness of her attire, the advantage was not great, so unmistakably did deterioration betray itself in manner and voice.

"I disappointed you at noon, but I could n't help it," said Raynor. "Did they come for the rent?"

"No."

"What extraordinary luck! Well, here you are. St. George paid up to-day."

"I don't need ten," said Lilla, drawing back.

"You 'd better keep it. I 'm not a safe."

"I did n't tell you," went on Lilla, looking at him anxiously, "but there is money for me at the bankers' since December 1. Some time we might find a

way, but now I can't risk it. I had rather"— Lilla brought herself up sharply and did not finish.

"Of course," said Howard contemptuously. "Worst thing you could possibly do. That 's where they 'll watch. Oh, this is all right. St. George thinks I 'm drinking, though; wants to know where it all goes to. I 've been feeding him for some time on Mrs. Raynor's patent stove, but he 's getting shy of that. He 's a precious sharp old coon, though it took me some weeks to find it out. When I first picked him out of the gutter — you know he was knocked down by a snow-slide and went coasting on his heels — I thought he was done for; but I soon had him upon a doorstep, and he sat there, meek and innocent, with a halo of white hair and all plastered with snow like a new kind of elderly angel. I shall never forget the old gentleman's serenity. I 've told you about it, of course, and how things went on after that. He 's nuts, St. George is. He 's dosing me now with temperance tracts; my pockets are full at this moment; and if I go with him to a temperance meeting he gives me a quarter extra to drink his health with, and his pay is as regular as Saturday night."

During this rapid talk Lilla sat leaning forward with her arms on her knees. She did not listen closely, perhaps not at all in the strict sense, but she seemed to take comfort in the sound of his voice, and when he stopped she looked up. Howard had drawn a long poster from his pocket, and was looking at it in some doubt. He looked once at her, then slowly folded it again. As he did not speak further, Lilla

relapsed into listlessness, her head hanging slightly forward, as if the position were one she was wont to keep for hours together.

Before very long, however, both were startled by a heavy fall on the story above, and then came the sound of shrill voices.

"Who are those people?" asked Howard.

Lilla shook her head.

"I don't know. They throw things about pretty much as they like. In the middle of the night it frightens one."

"You might change to a better place."

"Then they would ask me questions," said Lilla anxiously. "I must be left alone."

Howard rose and strolled about.

"Well," he said at last, "you chose this place yourself, and when you want to change, I am at your service. How long is this to last? You have money enough. Why don't you appear again and brave them all? Or, if you are too much in debt here, go elsewhere and live decently. It 's frightful the way you 're doing. You don't eat. You scarcely ever go out. You sit here all day and lie awake all night. If you can stand it, I can't. It beats me entirely, and if you don't do something soon, I 'll bring St. George here to see you. I will, now."

"Oh, Howard," cried Lilla, seizing his hand, and, as she did so, seeing the tears in the young fellow's eyes, "be patient a little longer. What could I do? The trouble is inside; I could n't run away from it."

"What trouble? What is the matter? It does n't

help you to live this way. You go from bad to worse. I don't like it."

"I loathe myself," cried Lilla, suddenly sitting upright and stretching out her hands with a shudder. "If I could be rid of myself by killing myself, I would not hesitate, but I believe in the resurrection of the body, and in never-ending death."

So terribly did Lilla utter this confession of faith that her companion sat in appalled silence. The former stolidity of her face was broken by her suffering.

"There is no hope, because there is nothing really good in me. It is all delusion, all selfishness. I am unclean, unclean. The heaven is shut above me, and I never see the light that others do. The devil tries to deceive me, but I know him now. He wants another through me, but he will get only one. I know him now, and if I am weak, I will kill myself."

Howard sat in consternation, as her voice rose with this defiance to her invisible enemy. After a pause Lilla went on.

"They used to tell me night was worse than day, but the night is dark. It hides things. Nothing can be worse than the day. If there is darkness in hell, I don't wonder the devils go there."

"Don't, don't talk like that!" cried Howard. "It makes one horribly morbid to live alone. Besides, you are really ill. If you ever ate anything, I should think you had dyspepsia. I 've had dyspepsia, and it feels exactly like a guilty conscience. It would take an expert to tell the difference. It 's absurd for you to think yourself so wicked. If

you 're to be lost, I 'd just like to know what 's going to become of me. You have n't experience enough to know how good you are; though there 's plenty in this house that could tell you. It 's because you neither eat nor sleep. A good digestion roots out the sins and plants the virtues faster than a barrelful of sermons. I know how good you 've been, and you used to give me money, and you never even saw wrong things."

There was a silence, and then Howard went on timidly.

"I 've been told that 's the way saints do. They act better than any one else and then call themselves worse names. I never supposed before that they really meant it."

Lilla cast a despairing glance at her would-be comforter, and buried her face in her arms.

Howard sat for some time watching her, his face changing under the alternations of distress at her suffering and the reaction of his own natural buoyancy. At last he said in a tone of great cheerfulness: —

"St. George will be expecting me, I suppose. He told me to come again in the evening. I have lost some time playing hide-and-seek with a young friend of mine. A lovely chase it was. I get the fun of this thing and you the moping. Now if we were only on the stage, you would be escaping in boats and gigs, writing misleading letters, hiding behind curtains, and all sorts of larks; debtors would be politely hoodwinked and objectionable lovers tripped up; an Indian uncle would die, and everybody would

come to the front with a beaming smile. That takes gaslight, or else a little Spanish blood, which I believe I have."

"Did you say you were being followed?"

"Rather. I should be lonely without it now. As long as I see somebody, I 'm happy; when there 's no one, you can't run away from him, and that does make one rather nervous."

"Oh, Howard, I must leave this place at once. To-day I came in at about dusk, and a girl on the ground-floor looked at me very impertinently and called me by my own name. I did not acknowledge it, but I trembled all over. She must have got into my room somehow and seen it on the trunk, or else some one *has* followed you and talked to her. Who can be cruel enough? What shall I do?"

"Don't be frightened," said Raynor gently. "I believe I used your real name to her once and then tried to cover it. I 'm such a confounded fool."

Lilla's eyes were fixed on his in dismay, but he went on without noticing it.

"It makes very little difference. They none of them believe in your other name and very likely not in this one either. Besides, they 've no one to betray you to, even if they saw that name in the papers. I 've looked every day, and there 's no reward nor address. If they 're following me, they can follow me to one place as well as another. Either I must not come at all," — here a low moan came from Lilla, — "or else I must depend on outwitting them, and that I can very easily do. I can run away from anybody. Now what can I bring you before I go away?"

Lilla made no answer, but stared gloomily at the floor, and Howard, looking about himself to see what was wanted, took the ten dollar bill from the table and went out. Coming back, he lit the fire and put a little meat and potato into a saucepan. He also put tea in the pot. Then he touched her gently.

"You must do the rest now. I 'll leave my notice, too, to amuse you. Now don't be frightened. It may be better to get another place; I 'll think it over."

Howard could not know the lonely path her thoughts had traveled during these preparations, and he was startled when, at his touch, she clutched his arm and broke into sobs.

"Howard, oh, Howard! You 've been so good. You 've done all you could."

"Oh, we 'll come out all right. It 's always darkest just before dawn. I 'll come to-morrow night again, as near six as my little playmates permit."

Lilla loosed her hold and hid her face again, her sobs growing gradually less.

"I must get a little drink this cold evening," said Raynor, "so, with your permission, I 'll keep a small bit of silver myself. Folks like me have to wear their overcoats inside. Good-bye, then, till to-morrow."

Howard gave one last look of deep compassion at Lilla's bent head, then he unlocked the door and left her.

Quiet as Lilla looked, her mind was preternaturally active. She saw plainly that to remain under Howard's protection was to court discovery. At

first, she thought simply of running away from his knowledge, but in her present condition this meant cold, starvation, and slow death. There must be a quicker way to the same end. It was not attractive to die, but it was the least of the miseries before her, and then she would do no more evil to others. Even if Arnold knew the secret, forever hidden to her, of a pure and unselfish love, she would not learn from him, but he from her. He would believe in her, and there was nothing to believe in.

In the evening she went out for a little air, and on the way home, she saw before her a man and woman walking together. The man had drawn very near to his companion, and the latter ran from him a few steps ahead with a pretense of fear but a low laugh of enticement and pleasure, so that his arm was the sooner over her shoulder. Lilla turned away, struck to the heart with despair. The sight stunned her like a blow, for she could neither explain nor condemn it. On the contrary, this was what the world came to, what she herself was, but — what she would soon be rid of.

That evening Lilla thought out her project. She would leave the city, buying a ticket for some distant place, and then, whether alive or dead, she would no longer be heard from in New York. It would be well to get a pistol, and then her remedy would be always at hand, if there were any risk of discovery.

With this general plan of action in mind, she lay down to rest, but, as it proved, only to be the more conscious of fatigue and weakness. Over and over

she found herself imagining the details of some future deed, and over and over she rebuked herself sharply for giving it so much thought. She felt that she was not really a coward, but bodily weakness was too much for her and kept her mind at work. At last she sank into a heavy sleep.

When she awoke, she heard the hour of three, struck from a distant church. The few hours of sleep had had a wonderful effect, for she felt vigorous and calm. The night was cold. By turning her head she could see a few glittering stars in the dark-blue sky. Her room was very dark, and the house was quiet. Out of this quiet and this depth of darkness an unwonted sense of wholeness and virtue came to her. The decision of the night before had already lifted her out of bondage. Arnold was now safe from her. Perhaps, too, if she thus visited with death her sinful body, God would accept the sacrifice and not again enchain her within it. She remembered standing once with Arnold under some tall elms in Newport. He was speaking enthusiastically of riding, and looked as if made for it. She remembered following him as he carried the bloody-nosed little urchin, and how Arnold held him in his lap and washed his face from the basin she held.

Lilla's thoughts were sweet to her as she lay thus in the darkness. It was long since they had been so free from herself. It was her blessed decision that had freed her and given her a sensation almost like self-respect.

It was not until she was preparing her breakfast the next morning that she discovered why Howard

had left that long advertising poster behind him. It fluttered up as she was moving from the stove to the table, and the name, Robertson, caught her eye. She took up the notice hastily. Mr. A. Robertson. It might be he. The notice was issued by some union for evangelistic work, and announced a meeting, with music from a chorus and wind-instruments, and among the speakers was mentioned Mr. A. Robertson. It might be he. He did do such things. Perhaps Howard knew it was he, since he had left the notice. She wished she had not seen it, for the meeting was to be at eleven o'clock that very day and not far away, and the knowledge gave an unwelcome shock to the dull, stubborn determination which had come to Lilla with the daylight. She felt her heart beating as she moved away. By eleven she must be out of New York with her new weapon in her pocket. It was the test of her sincerity. What good would it do to stand in a side street and see him from a distance? Were her virtue and her blessed peace but phantasms of the night?

Thus the battle raged again on the very point she had thought settled beyond recall.

"God help me," she cried. "I will not flinch. For his sake, I will not. I will rid him of myself."

With this resolve she turned again to her preparations. She ate her breakfast and put away the dishes. In the midst of her occupations some one knocked. Lilla was suddenly quiet, but it was too late.

"Here, I heard you. Don't pretend you 're out. Open the door."

The voice was gruff and authoritative.

"Who is it?" asked Lilla, her terror-struck eyes fixed on the door.

"Your rent 's wanted, young woman."

Lilla caught up a black shawl and laid it over her head and shoulders, then she hastily unlocked the door.

A stout, unshaven man stood there. She had paid her rent to him before, but Howard had been present, and she had scarcely spoken to him.

"Well," he said, with a grunt of dissatisfaction, as if he had been kept waiting for hours, "your name, young woman."

"Mrs. Waters," said Lilla timidly.

"Widow?"

"I think so."

The agent noticed her hesitation, and rejoined sarcastically: —

"Oh, yes, I see."

Lilla was so uneasy under his inspection that she tried to hasten the business.

"What do I owe you?"

"Eight dollars."

"Eight dollars!" repeated Lilla in amazement.

"Four weeks' rent, that 's six. Coal, with the putting in of the same by — ahem — Mr. Waters's orders, two dollars. Six and two are eight. That pays you up to the first of the month."

Lilla in consternation handed him the money. With Howard's expenditures, she had scarcely more than he asked for.

"Your friend in business?" inquired the agent, as he handed back a receipt.

Lilla turned from his bold eyes.

"In service," she said faintly. "Please go out and shut the door. You make it very cold."

"In service! You might do better than that. I don't mind committing myself to that statement, and there 's my name to it."

He laid a dirty card on the table and went out, closing the door.

Lilla stood looking with dismay at the small sum left to her. Her plan must be deferred, and it must be for long too, for Howard had brought the savings of the past fortnight. He starved himself as it was, and went shivering about the streets. As for her own belongings, she had sold all she could spare before she had accepted a cent from him. When she packed this little trunk, she thought she had put in a packet of money, but either she had been mistaken, or her maid had stolen it. Now she had the trunk left, but it was so plainly marked that she was afraid to sell it. There was plenty of money awaiting her, if she but dared to go for it. Howard might take her order and then escape pursuit, as he had done now so often. Perhaps, however, her check would not be paid, while she was so mysteriously hidden. It was more than probable.

After such fruitless thinking Lilla found herself yielding miserably to the temptation of seeing Arnold. Scarcely an effort did she make against it. There was in the room a fragment of a mirror; in this she surveyed herself. Her hair and neck were

wholly hidden by the shawl. In this severe setting her face looked strange even to herself; indeed, it was not the face of a few weeks before. Over the shawl, however, she crowded on a deep-brimmed hat and tied it firmly under her chin. She had no veil, but it was not necessary. At six yards' distance, even Elsa would not have known her.

When Lilla took her place in a narrow street which opened opposite the entrance of the hall mentioned in the advertisement, a few people were already entering. A placard on the door said that two choral societies connected with Baptist churches were to lead the singing. Lilla noticed with a start that the day was Sunday. Yes, it was on a Sunday the agent had come before.

The audience bade fair to be a large one, though chiefly composed of women. Among the men she did not think she could have missed the one she watched for, and yet it was now almost eleven. Possibly there was a rear door for speakers. Why could she not slip in with these sad-looking women? She at least was not ragged, and many of them were. Lilla was surprised at her own courage, but there was something enticing in the movement of the steady inward stream, and in the crowd she would be more hidden than where she was. At last, tremulous with excitement, she crossed the street and joined the entering throng. A young man in a long, brown coat came in after her, and found a seat immediately behind her.

Lilla was at first bewildered by the number of people. She had been so long alone. She was

seated at about one third of the distance to the platform. This platform had been enlarged for the occasion, and was closely packed with singers and other musicians. In the centre sat a group of men, one of whom rose just then to open the meeting. But Arnold —

She saw him at last, and so deadly a faintness seized her that she felt in a moment the insanity of her conduct in coming. Supposing she did faint and were taken out! And even if she did not, why should she have brought herself into such suffering? He sat in an armchair, and his face was now hidden by his hand. Some one was offering prayer. The time seemed endless till he again uncovered his face, and then she strained her eyes to read all that might be written on it. Alas, she could see but little. He was pale, perhaps, but looked well and in good flesh. Without moving his head, he could turn his eyes first on the speakers, then towards the audience, and he did sit thus motionless, as a man might if physically exhausted.

With this actual vision the self-distrust and scepticism of Lilla's heart was touched as if by a fiery finger. Whatever else was true or false, she loved him. Often she had told herself the contrary. She had denied it to Gardiner, believing her own words. In his own house, she had been too much bent on controlling his feelings to dare to examine her own, and since then she had persuaded herself that an innocent love was no longer possible to one so vile. But now the fountains of the deep of her heart were broken up. If, as some said, thought can travel

directly from mind to mind, how could he sit unmoved under the fire of passionate love and worship her eyes now shed upon him? Arnold! Arnold! Never would she sully his life with her own. Her love was too pure for that; the fancy that had tormented her that she loved even him impurely melted away forever in gladness as she saw his face again.

Lilla found the whole audience about her rising to sing a hymn. Her neighbor handed her a printed leaflet, and she rose and held it. The singing was powerful in volume, and was led by horns and trombones.

And now began the addresses. Arnold seemed to listen intently, though his eyes were on the audience. Lilla tried to listen, too, and to imagine his thoughts. It seemed strange to her to have him there at all; she felt that it must be under protest. For the speakers displeased her. There is a natural impulse to judge of a man's religion by its results in his outward appearance, — to believe that, when he is fired by missionary zeal, his object is to make others like to himself. Such a conception was disastrous to much of the eloquence then poured out, at least to Lilla's mind. She hoped that most people were educated under happier influenees than had fallen to the lot of these men. She looked over the platform in despair. With an audience of avowed sinners there is hope, but what is more obdurate than an assembly of the righteous? She did not believe them. God — heaven — accepting Christ — overcoming the evil one — in every case the words touched the springs of her enmity, not her sympa-

thy. Was she already a child of the devil, thus to hate the words of holiness? Would not Arnold feel the same? His face was absolutely non-committal; he followed gravely the course of the speeches, with neither smile nor frown. It pleased her to watch his quiet face and know that in everything he felt what was right.

Still, when his own turn came, he must disavow or qualify some of these statements. He would not assume this knowledge of the future. How could he, in a few minutes' speech, redeem these phrases of theirs from their narrow usage? It would take days for him to explain how deeply he differed from them. No, that would be hopeless. He would probably drop that cant altogether and speak simple words of love and righteousness, words of morality between man and man, which would offer no foothold to superstition. She would listen no more until he spoke, but would take her hour of comfort in sitting quietly and watching his movements.

Speaker after speaker rose and sat down again, and at last the chorus, led by a soprano, sang an adaptation of a famous aria from the "Messiah." Lilla started at the first words, and listened to them rather than to the music: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."

The words were sung as words of confidence, but to her they were far from that. Her hope was that her flesh could be laid aside forever. Perhaps the spirit, too, though immortal, could sleep as Nature

slept. Would God be less merciful than that to his creatures who had missed their mark? She would know soon. Even those that wrote the Bible did not know as much as she would soon.

As the music ended, Lilla lifted her eyes and saw Arnold sitting upright in his chair, listening to a man who had approached him from behind. Evidently some news had reached him. A shock of paralyzing fear swept over her. To rise and escape was the surest way to bring his eyes upon her. Arnold rose himself, — what to do? The leader of the meeting was at that very moment introducing him, yet he himself had turned the other way. For a moment only he stood thus, then he walked to the desk and looked over the faces of his audience. Lilla bent her head, fearful even of impossibilities.

Robertson spoke slowly and at first softly, but, as he grew accustomed to the hall, he delivered his words with greater force, till soon every syllable fell clearly on Lilla's ear.

He first expressed his sympathy with the preceding speaker, of whose words Lilla had no recollection. He then said that he had some facts to state about the liquor trade in that part of New York, and the support needed to make the existing law of high license a success. So closely was Lilla watching him, and so sweet to her ears was his grave, assured voice, that at first she failed to follow his statements.

Then he passed to what he said underlay all law, and that was the desire in our hearts for goodness and rightness of life. It was something which per-

haps we all have at times, but often it was but weak and hopeless.

"We have tried ourselves so often," he said, "and we have lost courage. We used to feel strong and hopeful. We feel so no longer. Besides, our sight has become dim. We do not see heavenly things as we did. We are not so sure that what we are doing is wrong; or if we do think so, we can't help it any more. Let the ministers preach to some one else about the love of God and the grace of God. That means nothing to us. It 's far away. When we were children, we might have believed it; perhaps we did then; but many hard and bitter years have passed since then, and what we are now we are likely to be till the end, if not worse; we 've tried, and it 's no use.

"Now," continued Robertson, "I want you to look back to some one who a long time ago trod this earth in weariness and pain, and was at last crucified. It was a long time ago, and on a part of the earth very far from us. But last night, as I was looking at the sky, I thought that he had looked up at the same moon and stars. The same sun, too, lay hot on his path, as he took his long journeys on foot. We can't be so very far from him when the same sun that watches our lives watched his life. And what message did he bring? 'I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me may not abide in darkness.'

"We know the light that he brought. We know that he could see the face of God, to which we are blind; that he was tempted in all points as we are,

but that he conquered. And now he holds out his helping hand to us. He does not ask much at first. He says first to trust him. Is it hard to trust him? The poor leper came and knelt to him and said: 'Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.' Cannot we look up and say that to him? The sick woman came and only touched the hem of his garment, but it was the touch of trust, and she was healed.

"The next thing is to do things because he did them. 'He that hath this hope purifieth himself even as he is pure.' Perhaps we can't any more see for ourselves what is right, but we can see him. We can say, 'What he did I want to do, and with his help, I will do it.' It is very hard, this first step. It is very dark on the new path ahead. Our only hope is in him who has loved us and given himself for us. We can say to ourselves this: 'I love him, and I will do the things he does. Even if I fall, I will rise up again.'

"And then slowly light and courage will surely come. 'In his light we shall see light.' Our hearts which have been cold and lonely, like hearthstones when the fire has died out, will be kindled again with the love of God, and our whole life will become warm and habitable. 'For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.'"

Lilla listened with close attention. She believed him, but then she had always done that. In his

fellow-Christians she did not believe. Alone by herself she did not believe. But why not take his help? Why not believe in the light of his faith? Ah, she knew now how to interpret such thoughts. They, too, were the suggestions of the devil. She had promised herself only yesterday that she alone would carry this burden, the burden of blindness, of vileness, of spiritual deadness, and she would keep that promise. She would carry it, but why not to Him who alone could save, who taketh away the sins of the world?

The people about her were standing and singing, but as she raised her eyes, she saw with terror that Arnold had left the platform. She must get away. Quick, quick, before he could reach the door. She forced her way through. Was he ahead of her? No; the street was clear. She turned away from her own home, and with all the speed of fear disappeared from sight.

With great reluctance had Robertson consented to speak at this meeting. Each day now was one of sorrow of heart, and his nights had of late brought little rest to him, so that his thoughts were hardly enough his own to attempt it. And yet much of his time was spent in idleness. His one hopeful clue, through Howard Raynor, was one he could not follow up in person. Almost every day he met his agents, heard their doings, and spurred on their zeal. For himself he invented occupation, especially for evening hours, and not once only did he spend almost the whole night in the streets. In this way he became entangled in measures of relief for mis-

ery quite outside his own. These tried his patience sorely, for every moment thus spent seemed stolen from one who had a right to them, yet it was far better than staying at home.

When at last he was invited to speak in the very part of the city to which his clues were leading him, and at a time of day which he could invent no way of using except in purposeless strolls, he accepted in a sort of despair. On the morning of the day, one of his detectives, a man named Bryce, came to say that Raynor had at last been traced to a house in the neighborhood he so much haunted, and that he had put on a man to watch the door; also that he was then on his way to see the owner of the tenement in question. Robertson asked him to report any further discoveries at the hall, having long before this submitted to Bryce's earnest assurances that the very best thing he could do was to keep out of the way.

Before he started he received a letter from Mrs. Willcox saying that Elsa had come to see her, being sent by Mrs. Miller. She went on to explain: —

"Elsa has married a Mr. Jackson, a buyer for a Chicago boot and shoe firm. He is now in New York on that business, and has brought his wife with him. Elsa had not heard of Miss Wilton's troubles. You may imagine her distress. She will try to see you, and I think you will find her of service."

The man who came to Robertson's chair on the platform was Bryce himself, who whispered that he had found a man, Johnson by name, who collected

rents in that tenement and that he had him then outside, if Mr. Robertson cared to speak with him.

Arnold sent word that if Mr. Johnson would wait, he would be out in five minutes; if he could not wait, he would give up his address and come at once.

After the meeting, Arnold found Johnson waiting. He was stout, and had a rough, unpleasant face; he was very eager to give his information, and very certain it was just what was wanted. Robertson had been through too many such scenes to feel any hope.

"What name?" he asked, in response to Johnson's voluble description.

"Mrs. Waters, she said. A feigned name, of course, sir. They all do it."

"I should say, sir," put in Bryce, "that Wilkins made some inquiries in the house and had the right name given him."

"Without his suggesting it?"

"Oh, of course," returned Bryce.

Arnold immediately asked the date of her arrival, and that proved to be a few days after Lilla's disappearance. She might have gone elsewhere first. The description of Raynor was perfect, and indeed he was known to visit the house. The other description might possibly be of her, if she had greatly changed. The result was that Bryce was dispatched to get Wilkins's report, as he was watching the house. Bryce returned, disappointed.

"Wilkins is off, sir, and so she must have gone, too. Her door is locked, for I tried it gently; but

if she were there, Wilkins would be on duty. His orders were strict, and he had his dinner with him; and if she went anywhere, he was to follow."

"Let us find a place near by where we can watch," said Robertson. "We won't detain you, Mr. Johnson, if you will first give me your address."

"Yes, sir; here is my card, sir. Johnson, coal dealer; offices in three wards. You have the whole thing there, sir."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LONG watch Robertson kept through that December afternoon, yet as the hours passed he grew more confident and even exulting. If it was some one of her name, known to Raynor, it was she. He sat with Bryce in a small corner grocery commanding the door they were watching. They had tried in vain to get information from the shopkeeper. He was slow-witted and absorbed, seldom lifting his eyes from his customers' coins to their faces. Bryce was naturally a silent man, and, having informed himself as to his employer's plan of action, he tilted back his chair and remained with his eyes glued to the opposite house.

The delay did not disquiet Arnold. It was quite natural that Lilla should be away from her room during the afternoon. It might be dark before she would return. How thoroughly she had hidden herself! How frightened she was at her new freedom! How determined not to presume on his faithfulness! Was she earning her way, or had she taken with her enough to support her thus economically? She had enough money, probably, but he fancied she would choose to do something, only, perhaps, taking her time about it, and finding something that would bring her among children. As she had chosen such a neighborhood, she was perhaps working among

poor children, and in that case probably at her own expense. She must have suffered meanwhile, and she might be slow to believe that he could help her. But how inevitable he would make himself and his love! There would be no way out for her, her heart being already a traitor within her. Johnson had given a terrible description of her; "worn, tired, defiant," such were some of his adjectives. Then she could not say she did not need him. Even in his pity he was happy.

But he must be careful, — at once careful and outspoken. What could he get that would speak for him, unmistakably, yet without the unfeelingness of words? She had always loved roses. Every one does that, perhaps, but he thought she had a peculiar tenderness towards them. Would it be too abrupt to take some with him? He need not make much of them, but they would stay with her after he had left, and continue to speak for him. She would not refuse them, and everything she would not refuse was now to be hers. There was no longer to be any uncertainty in his conduct. Perhaps he would not have to leave her once without — Even in his thoughts he did not finish. What time was it now? Three o'clock. She might not be home for three hours yet.

"Mr. Bryce," said Robertson suddenly, "I have thought of something I wish to get. I will leave you here to watch. Don't interfere with or frighten her in any way, only watch, and be here, or have some one here to report to me. I shall be gone but an hour at the outside."

Bryce was in exactly the same attitude when Arnold returned with his roses carefully tied up. He shook his head gravely.

"Not before six, I fear," was Robertson's cheerful rejoinder.

"There she is now," said the detective suddenly.

Robertson rushed to the window. A figure in black was just disappearing within the door. Not a line suggested Lilla to him.

"Are you sure? I think you 're mistaken. You have never seen her, I think."

"No, but Wilkins described her to me. It is her dress, her shawl, her height. There is no mistake. Wilkins will be along presently."

Sure enough, Wilkins soon came strolling by, and was called in. He himself put the first question.

"She went in, I suppose?"

"Yes," returned Bryce.

"I could n't be on hand, for she has been as uneasy as a fox nearing his hole. She has gone around and around, and looked at every one. If I had not gone off, she would have spotted me sure."

"Where has she been?" asked Bryce.

"She has walked all about the wharves and ferries, and once she got into a lumber-yard and sat there forever. She talked to herself, too; I think she 's crazy. I began to think she never meant to get anywhere, but at last she turned this way again, and I assure you my legs are not sorry for it."

"It 's some crazy woman," said Robertson, appealingly, under his breath. Bryce made no answer.

"Oh, first of all she went to the meeting in this hall close by. She sat through your speech, sir, and moaned from time to time."

"He 'll drive *me* crazy, at any rate," said Robertson, still in an undertone. "I saw her just now. I know her well. It is n't the one. It 's some wretched victim of Raynor's."

Bryce looked at him for a moment.

"Then sit down, sir, and let me go up to her room. I have in my pocket the picture you gave me. I shall see at once if it is not the one, and we shall go off with easy consciences."

"No," said Robertson, rousing his courage at this, "I will do that myself. You both wait here."

"Her door is locked by this time. You should have been cleverer," murmured Wilkins.

Bryce gave him a look which meant that he was to mind his own business, and as Robertson went out they both placed themselves silently at the window.

On the lower floor of the house where the black figure had entered, Arnold paused to bethink himself. Perhaps a certain amount of deception would be necessary. Whoever this was, it was some one in great trouble of mind, and he must act with consideration. He determined to try to get some woman's help, and accordingly knocked on the door nearest to him. After a moment's delay it was opened by a little old woman of hideous face. Robertson looked away, not caring to analyze the unhuman whole into its details.

"Is there a Mrs. Waters on the fourth floor?" he asked.

"Waters? Maria, here. Here 's a gentleman wants to see yer."

She screamed this out, and herself turned away. A tall, robust girl with black eyes came forward, her arms akimbo and her head thrown back.

"Waters? Yes. So she says."

"I want to speak with her, but I don't want to frighten her. If she has any acquaintances in the house, I should like one of them to go with me."

The girl surveyed him impertinently from top to toe.

"Hm," she said at last, "I should n't wonder if yer would."

Robertson felt that his move was a mistaken one, and he made her rudeness a pretext for turning abruptly towards the stairs.

"Oh, come now," said the girl, "don't be techy. I 'll help yer. Lemme see. She has n't any acquaintances and would n't never let me in, but I 'll pertend I have a note for her, and I 'll lay it by her door, and when she hears me go off, she 'll get it. Will that suit yer?"

Robertson shuddered at the proposed trick and at the accomplice who was to help him, but the plan promised better success than any he could devise for himself.

He took a quarter of a dollar from his pocket and also his note-book. He scribbled a few lines and folded the paper.

"You shall have a *bona fide* note," he said, "and this for yourself."

He followed the girl softly upstairs, keeping time

to her steps, which were by no means light. On the fourth floor he went towards the front of the house, so that the door would not open on him. Maria knocked loudly.

"Note for yer, Mrs. Waters. Note left for yer downstairs. Ben keepin' it till yer come in."

"Put it under the door, please," said a voice which sent a thrill through the silent and guilty-minded listener.

"'T won't go under. I won't be bringing up notes for yer, if yer can't open the door. There, it 's on the floor. Bad luck to yer!"

Maria stumped heavily downstairs again, and Arnold hastily pushed the note farther from himself and withdrew into a doorway. After a few moments the door was opened, and a woman bent slowly forward and took up the note. She turned it over doubtfully and withdrew. Like a flash Arnold darted forward, and placed his foot in the way of the closing door.

"Lilla," he said gently. "I have brought my own note."

Hearing no reply, he pushed the door open.

Lilla was standing opposite him, deadly pale, her eyes like those of some hunted animal. She was clutching his note, but she made no movement. For a minute or two they stood thus in silence, Arnold learning by the eyes what he would have believed in no other way. He saw Lilla, and yet he saw a woman apparently hopeless and reckless, conscious of his gaze and not shrinking from it, yet carrying both in her dress and countenance the marks

of deterioration. The horror of the sight entered his very soul, and he did not know how long he had stood thus when he at last tried to speak. His voice failed him at first, but with an effort he began again.

"Thank God I have found you. Why have you made it so hard?"

Lilla made no answer, and for a few moments Robertson breathed hard in silence.

"Why did you come here?" he asked at length.

"To hide myself away forever," said Lilla in a voice he would scarcely have recognized.

"Why should you do that? Have you done anything wrong?"

Lilla did not speak, but a look of such terror and despair came into her eyes that Arnold covered his face and groaned aloud. He had seen before such a look of self-hatred in a woman's eyes, but under circumstances too terrible to recall. Suddenly as he stood thus, he heard a ringing in his ears. He grasped the chair in front of him, and for a few moments saw nothing. Then his eyes cleared.

"Lilla, tell me," he cried passionately, — "tell me the worst of yourself. Tell me all. Have I not a right to know?"

"To-morrow," suggested Lilla, her eyes fixed steadily on his deathly pale face.

"To-morrow?" repeated Arnold, scarcely able to think. "You would promise to be here to-morrow without fail?"

"Yes."

Robertson sat down, and buried his face in his arms. Why should he come back at all? What

was there left for him to suffer or to do? She needed help indeed, but he could not give it. There was a self-sacrifice which could not be asked of a man. When he at last looked up, she was watching him with the same patience or unfeelingness.

"Do you want me to-morrow?" he asked, miserably avoiding her eyes.

"Want you?" repeated Lilla.

"Would some one else do?"

Lilla shrank back.

"Yes," she said in a low voice.

"If there was anything to be done," went on Robertson.

"There is nothing, nothing at all," said Lilla.

Another silence followed, then Robertson said in an altered voice: —

"I am a coward. Let me do at once what I can for you. You have been long enough friendless."

"To-morrow is better," insisted Lilla.

"You wish me to wait till to-morrow?"

"Yes," said Lilla, working her lips strangely.

"You promise me to take care of yourself and to be here to meet me?"

Lilla lowered her eyes.

"Without that promise I will not leave."

Another pause.

"Yes, I promise."

"Solemnly, as you hope for God's mercy?"

"I will not break my word to you."

Arnold was satisfied, and took up his hat.

"Your box," said Lilla, glancing at his package. She might as well have said roses, for they had already announced themselves.

Arnold's lip quivered as he turned back.

"I — I have no use for them. May I leave them there?"

Lilla assented gravely, and he hastily withdrew.

Until the sound of his steps had wholly ceased, Lilla sat motionless; then she sprang up, locked the door, and threw herself on her knees.

"Thank God, thank God!" she cried, and burst into a flood of passionate tears. The dreaded crisis was past. Arnold had himself recognized her degradation, and was of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. His love had yielded to pity. She had been so unaccountably foolish as not to trust him. Had not Gardiner said that to love him was the only goodness he asked of her? Arnold was different, and now she had hope. He had no longer a use for his love-offering. She blessed the lips that had said those words. He had not denied her wickedness, not tried to explain it away. She could trust him better than herself. How good he was, and what a heart-draining relief it was to weep these hot tears of gratefulness that this goodness was beyond her power to sully! Did not the Bible say that the Father had given unto the Son to have life in himself? They were strange words, but perhaps Arnold would thus give her to have life in herself. That was what she must have. How he had suffered! She had not been blind, even though she could not help. The tears rushed forth anew at every remembrance of his solitary struggle. But he had conquered. He would suffer again that very night, but he would conquer. That which is born

of God overcometh the world. It was strange how in this dawn of hope so many words of Scripture came to her mind.

As she knelt thus, pouring forth in successive bursts of tears the despair and horror of the past few weeks, the rich breath of the hidden roses stole to her senses. She thought she would uncover them, — without touching them, for they were not hers, — and see what Arnold would have given the woman worthy of his love. She untied the box and pulled a little at the roll of cotton inside. She pulled farther. Ah, what wonderful creamy pink roses! They lay there spotless and perfect, with the dew of their innocence still upon them. Some women were like that.

Again Lilla hid her face, and this time remained long motionless. It grew dark, though it was but five o'clock. She had not eaten since morning, and her fire had gone out.

Suddenly she roused herself.

"They are not mine," she said to herself. "I must not keep them."

She lit her lamp and found some cold fragments, on which she made her supper. She knew from some hint of Howard's that his wife knew her name and had no kindly feelings towards her. This might be made different. She would go to see her, and if all went well she would give her roses to her. She was tired, indeed, but she had a strong desire to see some other woman, and this was the wife of the man who had been her only dependence. As for Howard, she would leave a written line for him, in case he came before her return.

It was odd to leave her door unlocked and to walk fearlessly through the streets. She was discovered at last, and nothing but good was coming of it. After a somewhat weary walk, she found the house by its number, and went up the stairs, which seemed to her marvelously clean and well-lighted. When she reached the door she knocked timidly, and she had to knock more than once, for some one was moving about briskly and noisily within.

When Mrs. Raynor opened, she stood in silent surprise. Though her visitor's face was wholly unfamiliar, she guessed immediately who it was. Her own face grew stern and forbidding.

Lilla entered almost without permission. Her face was tear-stained, but stamped with a new gentleness, and she seemed equally unconscious of her shabby attire and of her chilly reception.

"This is Mrs. Raynor?"

"Yes."

"Of course you do not know me, but for the last few weeks your husband has been an angel of goodness to me, keeping me from starvation and despair, though depriving himself of daily necessities to do it, and keeping secret for me my hiding-place. I wanted to tell his wife how good he is. My name is Miss Wilton; perhaps you may have heard of it."

"Yes, I know," said Mrs. Raynor, staring at her visitor in much bewilderment.

"I saw Howard last yesterday," went on Lilla, "and to-day I have been found out by one of my old friends. I don't suppose I shall hide any more, but live quietly where my friends will know about me;

and Howard will be very glad, for it has worried him."

"Yes," said Mrs. Raynor again. She did not ask her visitor to take a seat, and her face did not relax a muscle. Lilla fingered her box uneasily and at last added:—

"That is all. Will you tell your husband, please?"

She moved towards the door, from which Mrs. Raynor stood aside.

"What am I to tell him?" she asked in a harsh voice. "Have you a new address?"

"No, not yet. Mr. Robertson is coming again to-morrow, and then I will decide."

The tears were in Lilla's eyes. She had come so far, and was so much disappointed.

"Mr. Robertson? Mr. Arnold Robertson?"

"Yes."

"I am glad you mentioned him, for he taught me a lesson I 've been pretty near forgetting. Sit down, please, Miss Wilton, and rest yourself. I should have asked you before."

Lilla accepted gratefully.

"Do you know him?" she asked, wondering.

"I do, indeed. I knew you, too, from the first moment, Miss Wilton, and if you had n't used Mr. Robertson's name, I don't know that I could have said the first word to you."

"He makes the rough places smooth for me," cried Lilla, her eyes overflowing. "God bless him for all his goodness."

"You have known Howard long?"

"Yes, he has always done me friendly services. First of all, he returned me some money I had dropped. Then he stood between me and a man who was trying to blackmail me. Then, lately, when I felt that I must break my engagement — for I was engaged to be married — and besides hide myself from my friends and my means of support (I was so wretched I could n't bear to see any one), he took care of me and got me a room, then changed it to hide me more securely; and he has come to see me almost every day, and has done all he could, — and I knew you could n't know, for he was keeping my secret for me, and you would wonder where so much of his earnings went to, and think he was drinking, when it was all spent on me, out of the goodness of his heart. I know you do love him, Mrs. Raynor, but if you had seen what he has done for me, you would love him still more."

Mrs. Raynor walked to the other end of the room, and when she returned her eyes were wet. She sat down by Lilla and took her hand.

"I thank you so much for telling me about Howard. I wonder if I shall ever be good enough for this world, not to speak of a better one. I used to think it was God who had wronged me; then the world, and then my husband. The fault was inside all the time."

"How did you learn better?" asked Lilla gravely.

Mrs. Raynor was silent for a few minutes.

"It 's perhaps useless to go through the usual tale of how carefully I was brought up and how different things used to be with me. There are thousands of

women in New York who could say the same thing about their bringing-up. But I speak of it so that you may know what the change was after my marriage, and later, when I had allowed myself to quarrel with Howard, and he had left me thrown on myself for help. I simply can't tell you all I suffered then, and poverty and all the hard sides of life came just when I had no courage. Howard is never — well, never very provident. I had nothing to fall back on, and I would not go to my father, who had forbidden my marriage. Well, I lived on one way or another for a year or two, sometimes working, sometimes doing worse. Yes, I did drink at one time, Miss Wilton, and why it has not grown on me more I don't know, only when I met with a little kindness and hope, then I would leave it off for a while. Once in about so often Howard would drift around to see what I was doing, — he was always an affectionate sort of fellow, — but I believed all sorts of hard things of him, and treated him worse than a dog, and then he would slink off.

"Well, once, things were pretty bad. It was last spring. I was coming home desperate. I had nothing to do, and indeed if I had had something might not have done it, and Howard — well, as I say, I thought Howard was worse than he was; and when I got to my room, I found it as cold as the street, for the people next me had been in there drunk, and had managed to break my window. It all came over me what a miserable life I was leading, and how there was no help for a poor woman from God or man, and everything was dead against me;

and I gave up, and was sobbing in the corner when Mr. Robertson came in. I had seen him only the day before, and had told him what I thought of Howard, how bad he was. He remembered it, and came around the next day to see me, and found me like that.

"I can't remember all I said to him, but I know I used very bitter words. I told him there was no end to be got in struggling any longer, and that I would not keep it up. Then he began talking to me in a wonderful way. He said he had decided for himself that life was not worth its struggles unless through life we found the love of God; that God, too, longed for that same union with us, — not our fear and obedience merely, but such love, approval (one might say), satisfaction, worship, and trust, that we should become free from ourselves forever. He said that God's love was the great reality all about us, but that we lived with closed doors, seeing only what was passing away. He showed me my broken window. The whole panes were dim and dusty, but through the broken ones the sunlight was streaming, making a path of glory through the room. So, he said, we tried to make our lives whole and tight against God, to be sufficient to ourselves, but that sometimes God had to break down our defenses before the light of his glory could shine through to us."

"And you believed it because Mr. Robertson said it," put in Lilla.

Mrs. Raynor looked perplexed.

"Because he showed it to me," she said. "Some-

times I fear I am following my own way of thinking too much, even on this new road. I am made a little perverse, and I make a point, I fear, of not feeling just as other people do. No, I did not see at once all he told me. He gave me a Bible, and one day I found for myself this verse."

Mrs. Raynor found the place in her Bible.

"'A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.' My heart *was* stony. I was bitter, and my mouth spoke bitterness, and I was myself the sufferer by it. But God was not false to his promise, and He took the stony heart away and gave me the power to become his child. Ah, Miss Wilton, it is the rich only who can be really generous, just as it is the honorable who like to give honor to others. I became rich. I saw for myself that the world in which I was deserted and poor and lonely was itself a show, that in reality I was child and heir of God. The world is a great test. To be rich, to be honored, to be poor or despised, are all alike tests, and our Saviour says the first are the hardest. If this life were all of life, I should fight against mine for its smallness and scantiness; but now all things are mine, and I shall receive them as fast as I am ready for them."

"Do you find all that in the Bible?" asked Lilla.

"It is there, every bit of it; but I have another book, too; you won't laugh at me, will you, Miss Wilton? When I was a girl I used to study it, for I lived near a college and used to hear the lectures

sometimes, and all through my hard poverty I 've kept this book."

Mrs. Raynor went to her closet, and brought out lovingly a volume of translations from Plato's Dialogues.

"Perhaps you would not be interested — so many are not; but it is so clear and beautiful. It throws light on the Bible itself. When I was miserable, I could not read it. It shows how beautiful things would be if they were true, and then in Christ beauty and truth come together."

Lilla opened the book and looked at its pages, but her thoughts were not on it, and soon Mrs. Raynor drew it gently from her, and sat in silence caressing her hand. Lilla rose at last.

"I will go home now. Will you take these roses, not from me, for they are not mine, but through me?"

Mrs. Raynor shot a curious look at the speaker, but accepted the roses.

"I will give you something in return, or lend it, rather. Mr. Robertson gave me this, and there is a slip inside telling me what to read."

Lilla took the offered Bible and hid it in her shawl.

"Don't go yet. Let me make tea for us both. Howard may come in later, and then he would take you home."

"Another time," said Lilla gently. "Tell Howard, please, if I miss him, that I am all right, and ready to see him to-morrow as soon as he has finished his work."

The message was needless. As Lilla was walking rapidly home and had crossed the last great thoroughfare, she saw Howard across the street, strolling moodily along with his hands in his pockets. She crossed hastily to meet him and touched his arm.

"By Jove," he cried, brightening most thoroughly and turning to walk back with her; "it is n't yet too late for supper, unless you 're expecting other company."

"Of course I 'm not," said Lilla; then, as his tone had been too significant to be mistaken, she added simply: —

"Who told you?"

"The amiable, charitable damsel on the first floor. So you 've seen Mrs. Raynor?"

"Yes, she was most kind to me."

Howard said very little more till they drew near Miss Wilton's lodgings. Then she handed him a half dollar.

"For supper," she said. "I will leave it to you, and will tidy up the room a little."

"I say," said Howard, gazing discontentedly at the coin, "would you mind making it a ten dollar bill, if it 's all the same to you?"

He felt, indeed, aggrieved that she was rich again and beyond the need of his help.

"How can I? This is your money," pursued Lilla, beginning to understand. "There is no one else to give me any."

"Oh, it is. Very well. I will purvey an excellent meal, with that most delightful of desserts, a little money over."

At supper, Howard was less sombre.

"You don't mind being found out as much as you thought you would?" he asked, after watching her grave, quiet ways.

"No, I was too much frightened about it. No one can make me go back to my old life against my will."

"Shall you draw your own money now?"

"Yes," said Lilla, a little troubled at the thought of that weight about her neck.

Howard gave a sigh of comfort.

"I should think so. Just think of it. One whole round thousand dollars every three months. Davids told me so. It would take me two years to earn that, even if St. George puts up with me, which he said to-day he did n't think he could. I suppose Mr. Gardiner rolls that up every three days, and invests it neatly at ten per cent."

There was no answer.

"How long shall you stay in this secluded paradise?"

"I don't know. I am to have one more talk with Mr. Robertson."

"Mr. Robertson?"

"I thought you knew he came here."

"I did n't know which it was."

Howard was more dejected after this. He set to work clearing the table and washing the dishes. Lilla helped him, and, as she came and went, many were the glances he cast silently at her. She was very tired, and at last, leaving him to finish, she sat down and leaned her head on her hand. Howard

disposed of his task, then took a seat on the low wood-box, and thrusting his hands in his pockets, stared at his feet and the floor.

"This dog has had his day, I suppose."

"Why so, Howard?" said Lilla gently.

Her gentleness seemed in some way to hurt him, for he sprang up and began pacing about.

"I used to think you might get some good out of me; that, if you would let a little of your kindness shine my way, I could forget for a moment my low-down, cheap, mongrel composition, and wear a sort of knightly armor as men used to do before New York and modern improvements were invented."

"Have n't you done it, Howard? How many of those knights would have been so loyal and gentle to a woman who had no claim on them; so unselfish in providing for her; so sure of her goodness when she herself was n't at all sure?"

"It 's always my luck to come a trifle short of what would be very noble and dip just a little towards the infamous. You don't know all, Miss Wilton. I 'd give the rest of my life if there was no more to know, and then you might bury me with a marble effigy, and the most touching of inscriptions. As it is, I 'll say simply that I 'm nothing but a State Prison bird, and if you don't have me committed when you hear my story, I shall be thankful, that 's all."

Lilla smiled at this extravagant talk, and Howard, again on the wood-box, went on quickly: —

"To-night I shall not undeceive you, so be kind while you are able. Tell me more now about what

you mean to do. You won't need to hide yourself?"

"No, I won't hide, but I must live very quietly. I can't make you see what I mean, Howard, but it is just as true that I am not yet a good and pure woman. So far I only want to be, and I must watch myself day and night, or I may yet lose my hold on that. I think Mr. Robertson may show me what to do, so I have asked him to come once more, and then I don't know. It 's very dark ahead, but I don't care what happens, if I can go towards the light and away from wickedness."

Howard sat doggedly silent, opening and shutting his jack-knife.

"He will make you think yourself still more wicked," he said after a pause.

"Howard, how patient I have to be with you! Let us not talk more on that matter. Come again to-morrow, after he has gone. You will see how much I shall need you. Indeed, this is a matter you don't understand."

Raynor took his leave, and as Lilla stood by the stairs to light his way down, he turned and said: —

"If I don't come to-morrow, it will be because I have sent my death-warrant for your signature. It may do you some good to see a fair-sized sin after all your microscopic ones. If I never see you again, it will be what I deserve."

Howard's voice seemed to choke him. He ran downstairs hastily.

By as much as the day just passed had brought relief and a certain sort of peace to Lilla, by so

much had her burden been transferred to another. It seemed to Arnold harder than he could bear. He had seen nothing of the dawn of hope and gentleness in her eyes. In his presence she had been hard, despairing, without feeling. Of his death-wound she took no heed; his former love, his present suffering, were nothing to her. He was to be the confessor into whose ear she would pour the tale, whatever it might be, of her defilement.

Robertson rebelled against it. Men might rightly be called on to prove in every form of loyalty and of conflict their love for what was womanly, but when this inner loveliness had been blighted, when a woman by her own confession was no longer womanly, the bond was broken. She needed help, indeed, but, to ask it of him was needless cruelty.

Besides, he had no help for her. For himself, even, his only gospel at this terrible crisis was a self-renunciation akin to despair. She blamed herself, and expected him to do the same. But he had no word of blame. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and the end of it is corruption. Most natural was it; and if there were another birth and development, it was assuredly not his to give. How foolish to say right and wrong to creatures of the dust! How inhuman of him to have sat thus as if in judgment on her poor, frightened soul! He could not let himself go again on such an errand, and he was not a prophet to bid the dead bones live. If anything had been visible of the woman he loved, he would be still bound to her service, but the change was too terrible to be gainsaid, and was beyond his

help. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and the will of man availeth not towards the birth of the sons of God.

Arnold was not able to shut from his mind the thoughts which the Bible associated with these. He knew that, though the power were of God, man was assigned his part. He felt even now on his lips the touch of the bread and wine of his last sacrament, binding him anew to speak his words who came to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance. This he would try to do in every case which he could approach with clear vision and mastery. Here he was himself weak. There was no divine efficacy in him, there was nothing but suffering. He might repeat to her old beliefs and hopes, but to speak from the heart was to speak misery and blindness.

The whole evening Arnold spent in such thoughts. He was often on his knees; not that he could frame his thoughts to prayer, but the attitude brought him more consciously into the presence of the Father who is also Christ's Lord and Father, and being there he held up constantly on his sore heart the burden of all this ignorant and guilty world, whose steps wander so far from the ways of peace.

"It is because they do not know," he said; "forgive them that;" and as he spoke he remembered that he who is to judge the world himself had made the same pitying plea.

In the morning he rose with a heavy heart. He had, indeed, committed himself to the task set before him, but it was without joy, or any knowledge of what he could say to help. Most horribly he

dreaded Lilla's humble, appealing looks, her confidence in his right thinking and his condemnation; and through all his preparations for the appointed meeting, he dragged himself along as a dead weight from step to step.

For long years afterwards that day remained in Arnold's memory as a light and inspiration. It is a happy moment when the little boat toiling painfully up-stream enters the lock-gates and soon, without effort, is carried on the bosom of the incoming waters to their own natural height. It is a blessed time when, forgetting our own weakness and giving over our own struggles, we may wait and see the glory of God, sometimes through people and ways which we knew not. Arnold had dreaded her confession, her dependence on him. He found neither. Gradually, as he was able to take in the change which had come to her, he saw her new gentleness, and felt by indefinable touches that the delicate poise and self-control of her womanhood had been restored. Now, however humble she might be, however shadowed still by the experiences of the past month, she had nothing with which to burden him. The revelations he had dreaded had vanished into thin air, or had been carried into the presence of him who alone can forgive sin.

Lilla spoke of other things, — of her talk with Mrs. Raynor, of Howard's self-sacrifice, of her own wishes for the future.

Robertson in his turn had news to give. He told her of Elsa's marriage and presence in New York, an announcement which Lilla heard with undis-

guised emotion; so little did she feel that she deserved this happy issue of events.

Robertson had to speak also of a great misfortune which had just befallen Mrs. Meredith.

Mr. Meredith had been unable to adjust himself to his recent losses, and had used and lost a considerable sum of money which was his only in trust. The matter was to come before the courts, but already he had sailed for Europe, leaving his wife to follow more at leisure.

"It will kill her," Lilla cried, as she began to understand the full meaning of this announcement. "You have seen her, of course."

"Yes," said Robertson, "but she says not a word to me about it. Our talk has been wholly of you."

"Is it possible for her to think him innocent?"

Arnold shook his head.

"Ah, I must see her, if you think she will see me. And Elsa, as soon as I have more decent lodgings, will you send her to me? I think, Mr. Robertson, I will take some rooms near Mrs. Raynor. I want to live alone, and I have indebtedness to work off."

She paused, and Arnold looked at her very hungrily, though silently.

"It seems but a poor return to you," she went on at last, "to say simply 'I thank you.' You have lifted me out of my terrible slough; it must be my part now to follow the right path, and I think I must do it alone; but I shall never forget what you have done for me."

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was not long before Lilla, by previous appointment, went to see Mrs. Meredith. She found the house full of the signs of approaching departure. At the foot of the stairs she met the children starting for a walk, and it was significant of her feeling towards herself that she refrained from going close to them, though the elder ones knew her well. The carpet on the stairs was being taken up, which made her passage somewhat difficult. When she reached the disordered drawing-room, a chair was cleared for her, and soon Mrs. Meredith came down from her room and greeted her affectionately, though without effusion.

"I am glad to see you once more," she said. "I sail Wednesday, you know, with the children."

"Yes, I know. It 's a great loss to me. I feel that I have the full right of a friend with you, dear Emily. Our understanding is perfect, whether we give it words or not. I hope you will not find it a burden to keep me informed of your plans."

"I will write, certainly. I must say, though, that our understanding of each other is far from perfect. If you do trust me, it must be from instinct, and I may say the same of my love for you."

"I will tell you all a friend would care to ask. But let me understand first. Does your sister go with you?"

A look of deep trouble flashed over Mrs. Meredith's face.

"I must leave her. Ah, Lilla, you do know one of my thoughts. I must leave her to herself, — to God, as they say. I wish I knew what that meant."

"It means more than we know, more than you could do by yourself."

"I hope it does. Hetty tries to be kind to me, but she 's cruel to Tom. I suppose you are the same, Lilla, though you do call yourself my friend."

She raised her eyes with an eager, momentary hopefulness. Lilla could not meet the look. She replied: —

"I know nothing, of myself. I have heard through one person only."

"Yes, Mr. Robertson. They were never sympathetic. Tom was always so good about him. Perhaps if I had been more by my husband's side, — you cannot understand, Lilla, no woman can, a man's position; Tom's, especially. He is so generous, free-hearted, downright. He takes life very simply, and these matters are not simple. They are questions of judgment more than morals; the least mistake, an error in business foresight, and then the act becomes wrong, and every one is at liberty to throw stones at him. I never used to believe in a real devil, but who else would contrive such horrible dilemmas? — all one's best possessions in one scale, one's business credit, one's family, one's power of helpfulness, and, besides, dire necessity; in the other, only a little doubtful right. Does

a good God take pleasure in such deadly snares? such narrow escapes, if one does escape?"

"But," said Lilla, trying to forecast her friend's real judgment, "if the right, however small or doubtful, were in the other scale, you would prefer to have that made plain at once, rather than to have things go on wrong for a long time."

Mrs. Meredith made no answer, and Lilla dared not go on to remind her of the undeserved loss fallen upon those little able to bear it. She was dimly aware that in spite of her defense of her husband, these facts must have branded themselves deeper than all else. She turned to another point.

"The children go with you?"

"Yes. That was our understanding. Yesterday I had a cable message, asking if I could not come without them. It 's impossible."

"Is it impossible? I think I can understand Mr. Meredith's view of it, — from economical reasons in any case. Give it a fair consideration. I have no experience with children, but, if you could possibly trust me, I would do all I could. After you have seen your husband, you could still have them follow you."

"Lilla, you don't understand," broke out Mrs. Meredith. She stopped herself short. "I must ask you not to talk about it. Let me have my last few minutes with you on happier matters. Mr. Robertson has told me a little of what you have been through, but says that at last you see your way again more clearly."

Lilla gave in a few words an account of herself

since their last meeting. She made as little of it as she could, for she saw that it was an effort to her friend to listen. After a pause Mrs. Meredith replied: —

"You tell me but little, and yet I see but one explanation of your suffering so much under your engagement. Excuse me, dear. I may never see you again, and there is just one word I wish to say. We are all of us in this life dependent on each other; none more so than a man upon the woman he loves — while it lasts. If I know Arnold, he will not plead for himself against your present determination, but it will not be because he is strong and happy without you. You are seeking for something, — some religious ideal or faith, and are willing to sacrifice everything to that search. I want you to remember that in seeking such things for yourself, you may be sacrificing a life as noble as your own. You see Arnold on the strong side; I have seen him at times on the other. A woman may be willing to give up her own good ends to be the reason of strength in another."

"I am glad to have you speak to me," said Lilla, "but now I must make my answer. I am not worthy of him, but I need not rest my case on that. I appeal to your own touching words. A man *is* dependent on the woman he loves, and for this reason I owe a great duty — to Mr. Gardiner. In spite of what you say, Mr. Robertson is strong without me. Jeffreys is not. He is weak except in the strength of that love. I have never given Mr. Robertson any claim. To Jeffreys I have. These things cannot be changed by talking."

"For heaven's sake, Lilla, you cannot think of repeating your great mistake!"

"Need you ask? I could not devise a worse torture for Jeffreys."

"What then?"

"I can refrain from insulting him."

"You are wrong, Lilla. You cannot long hold such a position. In one case you can do nothing to give happiness; in the other you can do everything. One calamity need not create another."

"Do you suppose I have not thought out such arguments to the last sophism? The case lies here. I am in debt to Jeffreys for my promise to him. I cannot pay, for I could no longer make him happy. That does not give me the right to add to his unhappiness."

"Ah, Lilla, if you had ever loved him, it would have been different. Two men can't both deserve the same woman. One has won her love, the other has not, and there is no debt so binding as the debt of love. What has put all this into your head? Have you seen Mr. Gardiner?"

"No, but I understand at last what he suffers."

Lilla stopped with a deep shudder.

"Oh, Emily, I have as much claim to your silence as you to mine. We must bear our own burdens."

Mrs. Meredith was not satisfied, but she had no courage to remonstrate further. When she again spoke, it was on her own affairs.

"Mr. Robertson has been very generous to me. This house stands in my name, and Tom expected

me to let it as it is for a couple of years; but the more I thought of it, the more I could n't do it, while any one was suffering for our mistakes. So it is sold for the benefit of creditors, and as this leaves me without the money Tom expected me to have to get away with, Mr. Robertson has lent me money."

"But, Emily," cried Lilla, frightened, "have you a right at this time to throw away what belongs to you alone?"

She stopped, for Mrs. Meredith's sullen, miserable face suggested at last to her an explanation which the newspapers, had she seen them, would have corroborated. Mr. Meredith had, perhaps, not gone abroad empty-handed, and his cable message about the children might not have been dictated by any pecuniary necessity. As this conflict between the moral sense of husband and wife grew clear to her, as well as the horror with which Mrs. Meredith must look forward to a foreign life of more or less comfort bought with money not their own, Lilla ceased to wonder that her friend was so much shaken from her usual composure. It became more and more difficult to know how to break the growing silence. Mrs. Meredith herself, perceiving Lilla's new comprehension, at last spoke.

"I may have done wrong. It was against Mr. Robertson's advice, but I could not take advice. Tom would not know it till yesterday or the day before. I suppose his cable message was due partly to resentment about that. Oh, if I *could* but leave them! If they were only too young ever to remember their parents! Any asylum would be better for

them than their own home will be. You don't know what a dreadful mother I am. I hate the poor little things. I can't bear to see their small, childish faults. I have no courage any more. Do you think I could leave them? Do you think Tom and I have a right to do it? I know I am not like other mothers, but I do — I do wish that my only duty were to Tom, and that they — were dead."

Mrs. Meredith scarcely changed her tone as she said this. Lilla sat dismayed and oppressed.

"Don't try, dear," she said at last, "to bear more than your present sorrow. God is very good, as you and your children and your husband may yet learn. The world may be safer for your boys because such hard measure was dealt to their father. Certainly, I should say that, so long as you can arrange it, your children should be with you. Still you know better than I."

As she stopped she heard voices in the entry; the children were going upstairs. One of them asked for his mother, and the nurse interfered with some severity.

"Go right upstairs, I tell you. Your mamma does n't want to see you."

Mrs. Meredith's eyes met Lilla's, but she made no movement to disprove the nurse's dictum. Lilla's heart sank within her, and soon she rose to leave. Mrs. Meredith spoke.

"You won't forget what I have said. He needs you. That is something a true woman can never overlook, even for her own advantage. I fear I have myself been very guilty towards Tom."

Lilla looked sadly at her friend, wondering what woman had ever had a clearer record of wifely devotion, and she answered gently: —

"Dear Emily, you are not altogether right. There are many needs in the world and among them the great one you speak of, but it is not the greatest. We are not made for others first of all. A wife should have the freedom of that thought, and a mother, too, as well as all whose life outwardly is one of service. Arnold cannot really suffer from this better loyalty of mine. On the contrary, he would if I violated it. Jeffreys suffered because of that, even while I tried to please him. I know I am bringing sorrow to Arnold, and that I shall do so more than he now supposes. It is, indeed, my fault, but it is past my remedy. Then he is strong, unlike Jeffreys. His goodness does not depend on anything I do. Because Christ lives, he shall live. For him I am not afraid."

Lilla stopped with the sudden fear that, in her heart's pride and confidence in Arnold, she might be wounding her friend. The latter, however, showed no sign of it.

"Perhaps," she said humbly, "my fault lay in the other direction; if so, I fear I cannot mend. It must be different with husband and wife. They are one. Their acts belong to each other, and they can't think themselves separate as others might."

Lilla was deeply troubled, but found nothing to say, and soon with a few affectionate words they parted.

If Mrs. Meredith had been but guardedly affec-

tionate, Elsa made up for it. Miss Wilton had taken two scantily furnished rooms near Mrs. Raynor, and continued to provide for herself and cook her own meals. She could not rid herself of the feeling that the new life she proposed to herself could be more easily lived, if she retained in some measure her recent habits. Thither Elsa came, and disregarded all her new married dignity in her joy. Lilla felt that there was much for which she should ask forgiveness, but somehow in Elsa's presence she never reached the first word.

One afternoon, Elsa came to report on some commissions intrusted to her, in the way of disposing of unnecessary dresses.

In some ways Mrs. Jackson had changed from the Elsa of former days, for her happiness had had its effect. Her face was not so thin, her eyes were more self-conscious and responsive. She was dressed with the quietness of French good taste, and her foreign accent had not yielded to the American influences now so strong about her.

Lilla rose and held out both her hands, which Elsa with characteristic quickness pressed in turn to her lips.

"Do not scold," she cried. "See, I take my chair quite like a free-born American; that is, if Mademoiselle will do the same. Mr. Jackson wished also to pay his compliments, but I did not allow him to come so without an invitation."

"Give him my regards, Elsa. If I were seeing any one, he would be among the first."

"Parfaitement, Mademoiselle; and now, here is my business."

Elsa drew her notes and accounts from her pockets, and proceeded to explain.

"Nothing would please you better than to pay my bills, I really think," said Lilla. "It seems to me the money has gone a long way."

"But now with the dressmaker I have, perhaps, displeased Mademoiselle. I took to her all her dresses again, which were at Miss Purdie's, and she would allow on them — oh, nothing at all. She said they were all out of the fashion. But that is not true, Mademoiselle. They are very pretty, and with time I can do much better with them. So I took them away, and so I could pay nothing to the jeweler, but soon I will have money, and I will bring it, and Mademoiselle will say how much to pay him."

"This is very kind of you. I fear Mr. Jackson won't like to have you trouble yourself."

"Mr. Jackson is a very good man. He has almost the sense of a German man. I told him, and he told me yes. He laughs much like an American man. I tell him everything, and it only makes him laugh. I told him I love Mademoiselle better than any one, and he said he knew it; but as he had been so thoughtful as to make me married to him, he thought perhaps I shall be obliged to go back to Chicago just the same, so as not to break the laws."

"I suppose he has the legal claim."

"But if I had known, Mademoiselle, — if I did not suppose you would be married and never want or think of me, I would not have married. I prefer

the service of Mademoiselle to be the wife of any man in the world."

"Dear Elsa!"

Elsa started to her feet.

"I do, Mademoiselle. And when Mr. Jackson comes again to New York to drum for his shoes or what it is he does, I shall ask him to bring me always, and I shall see Mademoiselle, and I shall always be proud, and my children and grandchildren will be proud, to do any service for Mademoiselle."

"Don't promise for Young America, dear Elsa. You are not acquainted with them."

More than three weeks had passed since Lilla's change of abode, when she received a note from Robertson. She felt guilty, as she recognized the writing, for she had not yet written him, though she had half promised to do so.

The letter began with no preface but the date.

"I have just received a sad letter from my cousin, Edith Monroe, about her mother's health. They do not suggest my going on, but I am, of course, liable to such a call.

"Under these circumstances you will, perhaps, hasten the day when I may see you. I want to make sure of your continued happiness and welfare.

"Would to-morrow at eleven suit you, or shall I come in the afternoon? If you are at home, my messenger will wait for an answer."

Lilla had a morning engagement with a sick and neglected old woman in the neighboring street.

She consequently wrote asking him to come at any time after half-past one.

At half-past one precisely Robertson presented himself. He had not known just how she was situated, and he looked about him and at her with attention.

"Can you have had your lunch at this hour?" inquired Lilla after the first greetings.

"I breakfasted very late," said Arnold.

He went on asking questions about the Raynors and about her surroundings, and at last said: —

"Mrs. Meredith has arrived. Her steamer was reported this morning. In a couple of days at the farthest she will be with her husband."

The two exchanged a look of sympathy at the thought of this meeting.

"It is a pathetic sight," said Arnold, "to see her effort to trust him. He will do his best not to stand condemned in her eyes. She may have the good fortune to be deceived. If she is n't, I don't know what will become of her."

"The good fortune to be deceived," repeated Lilla half mournfully. There was a smile on her lips, however, as if for once she were using her friend's misfortunes as a foil to her complete trust in Arnold.

Robertson had seen Mrs. Meredith and the children off on the steamer, and went on to tell about it. As he talked, Lilla watched him, and her heart grew the heavier.

"Are you recovering your strength from your fever?" she asked at last.

"Yes," said Arnold. "It is always a slow matter."

"I have been such a burden, too," said Lilla sadly. "It is hard to know how to lessen it. Perhaps I scarcely did right to ask you to come to me to-day."

"Don't say that," said Robertson with sudden fire. "I think you will find you have not done wrong in letting me come. It is a pleasure to see for one's self that you are well; though as yet you have not your usual color."

After a moment he went on.

"I have a telegram since I wrote you. Mrs. Monroe is better, and they are moving farther south. You see I have got this interview under false pretences. If I make it short, perhaps I may some day have another."

There was a long silence; then Lilla said in a low voice: —

"It is consumption, is it not?"

"I suppose it is now."

"That is often deceptive to the very end. Don't you think you had better join them without being sent for?"

Robertson said nothing.

"There are two reasons," went on Lilla gently, "why you may think it best to go. The first is on their account. It must be such a sad time with them. And then for yourself. It takes a long time to get wholly right after a fever, and you have had no chance. I think a change would give you a start ahead."

Arnold looked at her reproachfully, then walked abruptly to the window, and in a few moments said: —

"I fear I can't do as you wish."

"Have you thought of it enough?" asked Lilla in a patient voice.

"Yes," said Arnold bitterly.

He threw himself upon a chair and buried his face. Lilla went on speaking, but with a tenderness he had never before heard her use.

"Why is it so hard? You know I say this only because I must. You know — O Arnold, I can't say it, but you do know."

Arnold leaped to his feet.

"It is what I am starving to hear. Tell me once, Lilla, that you love me, and nothing can ever hurt me again."

Her eyes met his in a look that was better than words. Then she turned away.

"Am I so near to convincing you?" she asked.

"Lilla! you speak well. I will indeed obey you. I will leave you for a time to the life you have chosen. You will come to see this differently, and I will wait. I, too, am jealous. You must come to see that what I need so much is mine by every sort of right. I will wait for you to convince yourself in your own way, but in the end I must have you."

Lilla made no answer. He was deceiving himself, but it was best so for the present; and though the law of right and happiness would not bend to his will, it was something to have him for a time happy in his hopes. She could not herself understand, but

she could obey her vision of the right. Perhaps this was the way God had chosen to protect Arnold from her. Faithful she would be to the last iota of her duty as she saw it, and then a better will than hers would be fulfilled.

"I can't leave you after all," exclaimed Arnold suddenly. "I am becoming superstitious. Who knows what will happen to you next? I left you once to be away a week, and had not a fear. Then you did not get a letter which I am positive was mailed and — well, things went as no one could possibly have imagined. Now I have no more confidence. I tremble every morning for what I may hear of you. I should deserve what I got, if I left you again after such warnings."

Lilla shook her head with a smile, a smile of peace and gentleness.

"Nothing but happiness can come to us now. We are free from what St. Paul calls 'the weak and beggarly elements.' We are in a new world, Arnold, and our lives are given to us in good faith; stones are not offered us for bread; by the grace of God we have learned to take up this world rightly, and it becomes eternal joy in our hands. Indeed, Arnold, we can learn but slowly how happy we really are."

Robertson looked at her almost in awe.

"You are right," he said briefly, at last.

"I must be right, for you taught me."

She put her hand suddenly to her throat, as if some emotion stifled her, and she turned away her face, which became radiant.

"Then I am to go to Virginia?" said Robertson after a long pause.

"If it seems best to you. You have not been out of New York since your illness."

"Will you write to me?"

"Not without special reason."

Robertson inwardly reserved his own freedom to write, and did not invite her prohibition. He was very happy. Law is the bliss even of love; the man who cannot find it in a woman's goodness often seeks it in her caprice.

He found several matters to speak of before he felt obliged to announce his departure. When he at last did so, Lilla grew suddenly sober and sat down. Arnold hesitated before he went on.

"For the time being you have persuaded me that it is as happy a thing to live anywhere in the same world with you as by your side. I don't know how long this theory will survive away from its inventor. I trust you, Lilla. I trust you never again to forget that we love each other. I cannot get off for a day or two. May I come once more?"

Lilla shook her head.

"Well, then," — said Arnold, nerving himself.

Lilla interposed.

"When you know what day and hour you are to leave, I should like to know just that."

"I will send you word."

There was another pause.

"Good-bye," said Arnold desperately. "Good-bye, and God bless you."

The December twilight set in early, and found

Lilla still kneeling and absorbed in thought. She had done right. That was the end of every way of looking at it. It had not been weakness to let him see that she loved him. It was due to his suffering. But she had been so happy in his nearness. She had thought he would take her hand in farewell. She had even imagined his lips upon it. He had seen only her eyes and her acts. Those had taught him the right course. But it was too dangerous. If there were really no hope, she must not see him again. It would be playing with hell-fire while her lips spoke of holiness. She was safe, — thanks to his honor.

"I wrong myself," she cried, bursting suddenly into tears. "If he had not been strong, I should have been. Ah, it is too new, too wonderful, to feel innocent, — to feel worthy of him, — for me to find another pleasure like it."

CHAPTER XXV.

On Christmas morning Lilla stood by her open window, dressed to go out, and waiting for Elsa. It was a clear, mild day, and the church-bells were ringing merrily. She had determined, not without many misgivings, to seek out Gardiner at his office down-town, where she knew that he often went to be alone on Sundays and holidays.

This wish to see him had been growing steadily within her, and at last she had written to him asking if she might do so. His answer had been brief and decided.

"I will not see you. I have no pity for your sufferings, as you call them. You will doubtless find consolation; if not of the kind this world gives, then in foretastes of a better. Women don't suffer. Any further communications will be destroyed unopened."

Nevertheless Lilla had determined to go. Elsa's arrival put an end to her meditations. The latter seemed dejected on finding Miss Wilton all ready to start.

"Will not Mademoiselle change her intention and go instead to church? By reflection, I do not like the better to visit a man who does not wish to be visited."

"I don't like it either, but I want to follow up

my note. Sometimes it is well to be bold. At the worst, he will again refuse."

"It would be worse if he should speak rudely."

"I will not give him the chance, and then he is a gentleman. Ah, Elsa, it will touch him to see me. If he is changed, I am more changed. It is always better for people to see each other. The only thing I fear is that he will again refuse. After all, he may not be at his office at all, and if not, we will go to church. Ah, here is Mrs. Raynor."

Mrs. Raynor came in with a very happy face.

"Howard is here now," she whispered. "He has been away for a week, and I don't yet know why, but he seems relieved of his trouble. He asks me to give you this note. I will come in again later. Now I am going out with him."

She glided away, and Lilla, much relieved, for she had known of Mrs. Raynor's anxiety, put the note in her pocket for future reading, and led the way downstairs.

As the two women left the horsecar, the bells of Trinity Church were ringing for the morning service. The air was sparkling with sunlight, and knots of well-dressed people were hurrying by. A few steps took them into more silent streets, where the lower stories were all closed with shutters. After a few minutes' walk they came to an iron building six stories high, on one door of which Gardiner's name was clearly printed below that of his railroad. The door was locked and barred.

"*Dieu merci*," said Elsa; "it is closed; he is not here."

Lilla was not satisfied. She was gazing at a man who was coming towards them, and as he passed she spoke to him.

"Can you tell me if this building is wholly closed?"

"I imagine it is," was the answer. "The front is all barred; there may be a side door."

The two women went to the side street, and found a door which, though not barred, was locked. Lilla persevered so far as to ring, and, as she did so, was startled by the immediate response of a noise in the keyhole. The door gave way and a boy's head appeared. After a short survey, the small janitor opened more hospitably, and then stared freely at them. He had in his hand an illustrated paper.

"Does Mr. Gardiner have an office in this building?"

The boy made an indistinct noise in the affirmative.

"Is he here now?"

"Unless he 's slid down the fire-escape. This is the only way out. I thought you was the 'Herald' boy, but I guess he found his stocking too full this morning."

"There is a paper," said Lilla, pointing to a tight roll on the doorstep.

The boy rubbed his eyes.

"I did n't see him, and he 's too lazy now to ring."

"Is the elevator running?"

"Shut down Sundays and holidays."

"Then show me the way up."

The boy led the way, after locking the outer door. When they had reached Gardiner's floor, Lilla withdrew to a seat at the side of the main hall. Elsa went forward.

"Say Mrs. Jackson wishes to speak with him."

The boy opened the door and called out cheerfully: —

"Here 's your 'Herald,' sir, and two ladies is waitin' to wish yer a Merry Christmas."

Elsa entered on this introduction, and in a moment Gardiner appeared from an inner room. He cast a scrutinizing look at her, but at that distance without recognition; then, with a word of excuse for his delay, he stepped to the door and called back the boy. He did not look towards the place where Lilla sat in shadow.

"Mr. Stevens will be here soon," he said, "to post up some books for me. When he comes, you can go."

"All right, sir."

"And see here, Tommy," — handing him something, — "this is called Christmas outside, I believe."

"Thank you, sir. Wish you a Merry Christmas."

Gardiner turned back, and Lilla awaited, trembling, the result of Elsa's request. She began to long for a refusal, fearing the loss of her own self-command. There was a profound silence within. Elsa had apparently made her statement, and after what seemed a long pause, their voices were again heard, and Elsa came out.

"Mr. Gardiner says he will see Mademoiselle, if it is on special business, but otherwise not."

Lilla was silent.

"Do not force it, Mademoiselle. Let us go."

Lilla rose, wrestling with herself. Not to see him was not to see Arnold either. She leaned heavily on Elsa, and for a moment did not speak.

"I will do as you say," she said at length.

Elsa without reply led her towards the stairs. As they reached them, Lilla groaned aloud. The door of the office was immediately thrown back, and Gardiner stood in the doorway.

"You must do as you wish," he said.

Lilla turned towards him.

"I have no special business."

"Do as you wish, and then there will be an end."

Lilla went forward, and Gardiner made way for her. Elsa took a seat in the hall, and the door was closed.

Gardiner placed a chair for his guest, then turned his own so that he could not see her.

"Now," he said almost rudely, "make it short."

"I was afraid you could not believe without seeing me how sorry I am."

The word seemed childish, but she found no other. She went on.

"I wanted, too, to know about you. I could not believe you would grieve long for so wretched a woman. If you did, I wanted to know it, to be myself the sadder. I have no way now of knowing how you are, and yet I care to know."

"Very well, your first object is accomplished. Now, if I say that I am in my usual health, but that at first I conformed to custom, indulging in the usual

agonies of a jilted lover, and now at last am ready again for daily business, will this cover the objects of your visit?"

"If I could believe it, it would."

A short silence followed, Lilla endeavoring to believe that his cynical statement was not far from the truth.

"You are generous to me," she said at last. "You do not say what you might of me, and I shall feel better than I dared to hope."

"Does this mean," returned Jeffreys in a sly, malignant voice, still gazing straight in front of himself, "that we are soon to hear of your wedding-day?"

Lilla started in terror; though he did not look at her, his attitude was tense and expectant. She made a motion, which he interpreted as an attempt to escape, and with a leap and what was almost a snarl he was at the door and had softly locked it.

"Don't scream," he said coolly, "I could kill you before she could get any one, and all I want is to speak. Yes, look at me. You had better. Can you read your own writing on my face? I don't suppose it 's pleasant."

He made an effort over himself.

"This style of thing has been done thousands of times, I know. Why should I cry out? But I 'm willing you should see my present self, — you, who know what I was, — that you may never again dare to feel innocent."

"O Jeffreys ! " cried Lilla.

"I know what a weak, worthless rôle I take in

condescending to speak at all. What is there in words but what words can wipe out? Curses even he can talk away, or, better still, with one of his sweet" —

Gardiner was stopped by her cry of anger, and raised his eyebrows with devilish significance.

"We won't mention them, then, but they will happen nevertheless. Don't imagine that I think these poor words of mine can prevent it. But this I do say, that the happiness you look for you will not get; the damnation of even a wretch like me will hang too heavily about your neck."

"Ah, Jeffreys, you carry this too far. Am I responsible for all your future because of that one act? Were we then living such a noble life together? What sort of a life was it? What was there but our fortunate circumstances that kept us from outward evil? I know of nothing. I, at least, was selfish to the heart; and even you, Jeffreys, made as men are of more solid fibre, was there an impassable gulf between you and dissipation? Was there anything but skill and knowledge of the world to make your business management different from Mr. Meredith's? From the first, Jeffreys, I believed that the future would bring, perhaps not disgrace, but what would deserve it."

Gardiner looked at her with surprise and contempt.

"This, then, is what you have succeeded in believing. I will not dispute your judgment of whatever you have seen of me, but for heaven's sake spare me your predictions."

"But think, Jeffreys, what you yourself were preparing for yourself. You were willing to marry a woman who did not love you."

"You did not love me? Your actions, then, were far from comprehensible."

"Ah, now, now, indeed, you speak truly. I have sinned deeply, but not in leaving you; and in what I did that was wrong, you were not wholly innocent. God knows how little right I have to say it, but you did ask me to be yours rather than to love you; you were willing to see me grow worse under your eyes rather than to set me free; in loving me you were really loving yourself, not honoring the first rights which God himself has in every one he has made."

Jeffreys started, as if she had at last touched the chord of his bitterest resentment.

"Stop just here; here I have something to say. I own up to it. I asked first and foremost that you should be mine. Is not that the usual way? Is it a man's part to be analyzing and weighing the love that is offered in return? Would it ever equal his? There is but one question, one test. It is, 'Will you become my wife?' You said you would. When you had said that, could I let you go? I am not capable of such an act.

"And now for your last — your only point. I might have known you would have brought in the name always called on to justify what merely human standards of honor and justice would find it hard to explain. Here I confess you can say what you like, and I cannot follow you even to contradict.

By these celestial standards you were continually measuring me, and I was most innocent of any conformity to them. I have no telescopes that command the invisible. I live in this world, and in the ties and duties and hopes which other human beings throw about me.

"Am I a devil, Lilla? something noxious, to be crushed out of the universe? I look at myself sometimes and wonder what it is all about. I don't hate my fellow-men; I often want to help them. I care for the things they care for; for study, for human ingenuity, for political justice. I am human, one of my kind. I don't always act up to the best I know, but I did in loving you. You say that in loving you I loved only myself. Lilla, you know whether that is true or not. I loved you far better than myself. You remember my faults, but I only your goodness and what it wrought in me. You taught me what it was to be happy. O miserable me, I shall never be so again. You will not remember — but I do — that evening when you drove home from the Vanderzees' with my ring on your finger. You were all in white, as beautiful as the angels in heaven; and you allowed me to protect you from that villain. If ever a man was in heaven — Oh, I shall go crazy, crazy, crazy!" and the wretched man threw himself on the bench near which he had stood.

In a moment he started up.

"Don't dare to pity me. That is nothing, — one day out of the thirty of my engagement, — all over long ago. I was a scoundrel at heart, of course. I

would have turned out so. Lilla, I was worth treating honestly."

"Indeed you were, Jeffreys," cried Lilla, her eyes wet with tears.

"There was something good in me then, but there is no longer any one to pick it out of the mire. God has his elect, and I am not one of them."

"He wants every one. He cares for every one."

"As you do? One after the other? Don't try any of your superstition on me. There is no one in this universe but ourselves, and we 're enough to people heaven and hell,— heaven for a day or week, as may be, and thereafter hell. Your turn will come, if"— he looked at her keenly — "if it has not already come."

Lilla rose slowly and painfully. She raised her head as if to speak, but the words died away.

"Perhaps you won't now go so directly into his arms."

"Jeffreys!" said Lilla, in a voice scarcely audible, "you are mistaken. He has gone away."

"Not to come back? Will you promise me that?"

"I owe you no promise."

"Ah, no," sneered Gardiner. "I thought as much. Time, the woman's specific, will mend all. Well, I 've put in my peg. Marrying him won't seem, perhaps, such a saintly act. You might as well own the truth. Men and women marry for pretty much the same reasons, whether saint or sinner."

Lilla had reached and opened the door. Jeffreys suddenly stopped speaking, hearing a sound outside.

"Mr. Stevens, have you come? Will you please show this lady the way out?"

His voice had suddenly recovered its suavity, and he made a low bow which his visitor did not perceive.

Lilla got out into the air as quickly as possible. She walked to the horse-car, and returned as she had come. She spoke not a word, and Elsa understood too well what had passed.

When they were at last at home, Elsa took off her bonnet and stayed to get the dinner. She wished to do it alone, but Lilla would not remain idle. After dinner, however, she consented to lie down, and Elsa, pleased to see her resting, darkened the room and departed, saying she would return to get supper.

Lilla had been lying with open eyes for perhaps two hours, when Mrs. Raynor knocked and entered. Her eyes were still full of happiness.

"Howard would like to see you, if he may."

"Of course," said Lilla, sitting up. "He is all right, is he not?"

"Yes, so it seems. He thinks you will not see him, though, and has been worrying over it for the last hour. You will remember what a boy he is, won't you, and that he has a good heart, whatever mischief he may have done?"

"Why, yes; send him down, please, at once."

Lilla was standing near her table when Howard entered. She looked up sadly, but smiled as she saw his holiday neatness of dress. He stopped and looked at her.

"Let me have it in words," he said softly. "A smile, however heavenly, won't quite cover it. Mrs. Raynor and I have been to church this morning. One absolution I have; yours I still want."

"What is it to be for?" returned Lilla gently.

"Have you not read my letter?" cried Howard, grasping the door-handle behind him. "My God! don't you know yet?"

"Forgive me, Howard, I forgot. I have had so much to think of to-day."

She took his letter from her pocket and sat down, while he turned pale and red alternately.

"This is worse than I ever imagined," he murmured.

Lilla first drew out a letter addressed in Robertson's writing. She looked up bewildered and laid it on the table. Then she read Howard's letter. It ran thus: —

"For almost five months I have been a coward, trying in vain for courage to tell you that the man you have been kind to is a thief. When I saw you in such misery, separated from every one who cared for you except me, I did not dare to make you so hate me, while I was your only dependence.

"Now you are happier. My wife tells me that, when she left you yesterday, you had a letter from Mr. Robertson. I feel less afraid, but not less guilty, in bringing you back a letter of his which I stole from among your letters at Mrs. Miller's on the 30th of July, because you" —

A mist came before Lilla's eyes, and she dropped the note. It was Howard, then, who had forever

separated them. She heard the poor fellow cry out and guessed what he said, but she could not answer. Then she heard the door open.

"Howard," she cried suddenly,—"Howard, come here."

He came near and knelt at her feet.

"Howard, I must forgive you, —you, who have taken such care of me. I know I had said dreadful, unpardonable words to you before you did it. I have never asked your forgiveness for those. This letter did make a difference at the time, but now it contains nothing we do not both know."

She stopped, and Howard remained on his knees with his eyes chained to the ground. His shame was too crushing a weight to allow him to notice the deception hidden in her words.

"It may no longer matter to you," he said, "but I would do anything to show what I think of myself. Make me suffer something. You know, you must know, I could never do such a thing again."

"I know you could n't, Howard. It was a great mistake. Now you have confessed it honorably, and it is a thing of the past. But I am tempted to accept your offer and give you a task in expiation."

"I will do anything in the wide world within my power."

"It is something you may not like."

"I am the better pleased."

"I am told that you have left Mr. Gordon, that you have not been there since I saw you last."

"I have not till yesterday, that is true. I meant to go back, but after seeing you crying the other day

I was so wretched — so broken up — that I positively could n't. I did go yesterday, and was told never to come any more, that I was n't reliable, and that the old gentleman would n't even see me. That I knew was humbug. St. George never said that to anybody. So I waited outside, and when he came out I cut in and sent the maid home, who was bothering the poor old gentleman, and I walked with him just as usual, and he was as sorry as I was, but said I had got to go, because they all said so. He gave me ten dollars besides the wages I had already been paid at the house, and I told him he had always behaved to me like a gentleman, and he began to cry, and said he wished every one could say the same of him."

Two tears stood in Howard's eyes, as he ended this tale.

"Then what do you mean to do now?"

"I should like to be conductor on a street-car. There 's lots of favoritism about that, but I know a man who would help me; only you have to pay for your own outfit and put down money as a deposit, and I have n't enough."

"Then what next?"

"That is as far as I 've thought."

"Well, Howard, what I want of you is this, that within a week you will find yourself some honest and steady work, even if it is work you don't like, and that then you will not leave it without my permission. Will you promise?"

"Unless my employers resort to violence, I will stay."

"And you must remember that you cannot treat everybody as you have treated Mr. Gordon. If your time is paid for, you cannot go and come at your own whim. You must behave reasonably."

"I will," said Howard.

His face had brightened and softened during the talk, and he raised his eyes to hers with a boyish confidence. Indeed he was like a boy in his entire unconsciousness of the load she carried, and Lilla had to tell him that he must go and let her rest. He rose, and she put her hand on the letter he had returned.

"It will be odd," she said, "to look over so old a letter. This is Christmas day, is n't it, Howard? I can hardly believe it. I am glad you went to church. You have done me good as well as yourself by that."

"I 'm glad if I have. We men are a selfish, fighting lot. There is no good in us, but the possibility of worshiping a woman, and most of us are too bad for that. But you see three months hence if you are not pleased with me. I will keep my promise."

More than a week had passed, and still Lilla had not found courage to write to Robertson. Her decision had been reached, and she had no doubt of her own courage to sustain it, but why should she hasten his suffering? She would give him time to grow stronger in the country life he was leading. Absence might do something, too, and the companionship of his cousin. She had had a few lines from him telling of his arrival. Mrs. Monroe did

not seem to him as feeble as he had feared. He had arrived on Christmas day, and that very afternoon had ridden with his cousin through most beautiful woods and mountain paths.

"I had forgotten," he wrote, "what a magnificent thing a good horse is, and how much more magnificent his rider. My sister is afraid of horses, and Edith has had no one to ride with. The poor child needs a little fun and brightening up; she says she had almost forgotten how to laugh when I came.

"I feel like a different man away from the city. I do wish you could feel it too, this distance from all the unprofitableness of New York. I never once forget that this good is what you yourself planned for me."

Lilla's heart had been glad at this news. She liked to think of him on a horse. This life would restore his strength and bring back the color to his face, and this was happiness enough for her. All was going on well. Why should she interfere?

A second letter from him changed her feeling. To begin with, she had not expected he would write so soon again, and then he was evidently feeling restlessly after news of her. She knew that he had taken some occasion to write to Mrs. Raynor, and had asked questions about her. He ought soon to know the truth. He was in the best place to hear it, and Miss Monroe was at hand to distract him from too great bitterness of spirit. For her own sake, it must be soon over with. It was too terrible having it still ahead. There was a limit to her own strength. At last, therefore, the letter was written.

"It is impossible for me longer to dream of happiness. I have known this since a few days after you left, but I have not had the courage to say so.

"Now you have the right to know why, and how can I make it clear? I have seen Mr. Gardiner, and I might say simply that at the sight of the wretchedness I have caused I have no longer the heart to think of my own happiness. That is true, but there would still be yours to remember.

"Arnold, I have n't the right — I have n't the right. I know it absolutely, but how can I make it plain to you? I will say what I can, but you may still have to accept it simply because I cannot do otherwise. You know what light, what knowledge of the glory of God, has come to us in the face of Jesus Christ. I have come into this light, and Jeffreys through me has lost the possibility of it. What reason has he to think God cares for his soul, if I do not? O Arnold, you know I was his promised wife. He has thought me his, as you never have had a right to do. He loved me truly, with all the joy of protectorship which a man feels; he was every day better and happier, through his own love growing towards God who gave it. But I was acting a lie, and it could not last. Now he feels he has a right to hate a faith whose first dawnings brought such misery to him. He does not see — why should he? — any God in this world, and he admits that hell has followed on this blindness. He is miserable. He hates himself and me. He knows of you, and dreads you as he would a death-wound.

"Do you know, Arnold, how a few weeks ago it

first became possible for me to see again any pure meaning in the word 'love'? I have had a revelation such as few women have. I know that love, so far as true, springs only from the presence of God himself. His law underlies it all and gives it life. Is it his law that I should build my happiness on Jeffreys' despair? It cannot be. Are not Christians first of all witnesses to God? It is because we are so happy that we must be so good. Think how many there are who cannot find him, who spend their money for that which is not bread. Is there not need of every one who has found him?

"I cannot say it all, but I think you will understand. At any rate, there is no misgiving in my mind, and there must be no uncertainty in our future relations. I could not endure any further uncertainty. We must be nothing to each other. I must hear once from you, to know that you have heard, and perhaps you will add a word of pity. After that, nothing; otherwise, I could not stand it.

"What will you say? That I do not understand? You said that once; perhaps you will again. You will say I am a fanciful woman, caught by some show of self-sacrifice, seeking a God of my own over-wrought imagination, instead of following the simple, plain road of human goodness and holiness. I have been so afraid of this, Arnold, with reason, too. I dread so much being weak and fantastic in a faith which may be open and clear as the sunlight. I suppose those who were torn by evil spirits before they yielded to Christ could not at once be perfect men in him. But this I cannot get behind, — God's

love in Christ is the one thing of value in this world. It is better than life. Jeffreys does not believe it, — does not think that I believe it. I would die to make him know the truth.

"I myself cannot write again. Be as kind as you can in your letter; it will make such a difference. Be kind even to my ignorance, my error. As soon as you can, forget me. My darling, forget me, and make yourself happy. You have a right to be happy, who have saved me.

LILLA HASTINGS WILTON."

In due time Lilla received an answer. She took it from the postman in the street, and trembled as she carried it upstairs. Whatever it said, it was the last thing that would be said between them. After this would come only memories and the attempt to put the touch of new life into words long written. She had not repented her step; she had not even dwelt much on her own loss, but over and over again she had tried to follow Arnold's thoughts from the time when he would first read her letter. She could not expect him to understand her position. It must seem to him an instance of the unreasoning asceticism with which women sometimes offset their worldliness. He would not see that any one was the gainer by such a decision. But he would be careful what he said. In his last words to her he would not put the sting of reproach. She knew beforehand how patient and gentle he would be.

It was a large sheet, carefully written over in the writing so dear to her, and began without address.

"Your letter has come, and I understand and accept most of what you say. Whatever I might myself have thought of the situation, I see what you think, and that is both binding on you and sacred to me. Our first duty, most surely, is not to ourselves or each other, we who have been bought with a price. I understand, then, that your decision is final, and that this is our last communication.

"I cannot, however, see any meaning in your phrase, 'We must be nothing to each other.' You must have used it in some conventional sense, for we are and shall be everything to each other. I have burning at my heart the joy and pride you kindled there at our last meeting. You love me, Lilla. I cannot conceive a test too severe for my happiness now that I have heard that. That is what I cared about, — nothing less.

"I know that this moment is not to be played with. It is to be followed by silence and one of the hardest misfortunes that can fall to a man. But, Lilla, you are right, — how your words ring in my ears! — 'stones are not given us for bread;' 'this world turns to eternal joy on our hands;' 'we can learn but slowly how happy we are.' I *am* happy. I *shall* live near to you even in absence and silence. The thought of you as you now are, strong as a woman should be in her own hidden life, able to hold everything else in its due submission, — this thought of you is my joy and crown.

"You will meet, and I believe overcome, the dangers of asceticism. Our Master is harder to follow than if he had not come eating and drinking. In

our spirit of self-immolation we are met at every turn by the gentle mockery of this happy world, which to the pure is pure. Our duty lies beyond the daily self-denial in that Godlike perfection and peace, far harder to reach, which judges nothing that men can love to be common or unclean.

"As for me, I shall not stay here very long. I am drawn to New York by every reason now left to me. I don't think I shall continue to live at home. My plans are really too vague as yet to be told. Of course, if you should ever wish to send me any word, my old address will serve.

"I cannot think that anything I have said in this letter will trouble you. I do not mean it that way. When I say we are everything to each other, I do not mean that we owe each other fidelity. (We are not pledged, even in our innermost thoughts.) I simply think that it will prove so.

"Perhaps you may wish for some more definite approval of your conduct. I cannot judge of the facts of the case, but of your principle of action, so far as I understand it, I do approve. You suggest that I may wish you had given up your theories and confined yourself to 'the simple, plain road of human goodness and holiness.' The phrase sounds well, but that road is anything but simple. The law of purely human holiness has never found its Moses. The care that is now heavy on your heart and is stronger than human love is a spring of holiness. Such new life continually breaks up the accepted order of the world, and unfolds a new being from the chrysalis that has stood to us for duty. It is

born not of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh; its first duty is to God who gave it. This is a hazardous doctrine. Our Lord himself, who declared the mystery of this second birth, admits that we must judge it by its fruits. With you, my darling, the fruits of peace, of faith, of purity, speak for themselves.

"Here, then, I will say good-by. If there were anything further I could write which would be a strength to you, how gladly would I write it! Do not doubt my constant confidence in you.

"Faithfully yours,

ARNOLD ROBERTSON."

After this exchange of letters Lilla's life became more settled. In spite of Arnold's belief in her right views, it was perhaps unavoidable that it should wear the outward aspect of asceticism. She dreaded to satisfy any but necessary wants while so heavily in debt to Gardiner. She was in debt to Mrs. Meredith as well. This fact had been so long ignored that it did not occur to her even when the latter spoke of borrowing money to get away with. Lilla had given a note at the time. After Elsa had disposed of the superfluities of her possessions at Miss Purdie's, the rest was sent to her, and then she found a memorandum of the debt. It was a thousand dollars. As soon as possible that must be at Mrs. Meredith's disposal, which would probably mean at the disposal of her husband's creditors.

Next after this weight of debt, Lilla felt the burden of uselessness. Here again, in the absence of

natural ties and of poverty, her actions took on the appearance of voluntary self-abnegation. She sometimes longed intensely for the control of a necessity that others would recognize, binding her to drudgery and silence. She wished she could appear in the severely ordered lives of those about her as one held by the same laws, and not as an eccentric, willful visitant from the world of leisure. She tried fairly and earnestly to find the highest work of which she was capable, not that which was a pretext for the idleness of her better powers. It seemed to be this: to go about among the sick, introduced from one family to another in the way of friendliness, there to nurse the patient under the direction of the local doctor, trying to introduce better and more cleanly habits into the household. With patience she found herself gradually accepted in her new rôle, and the sympathy and respect of those she thus helped made her happy to the heart. At first, she blamed herself for her own sober and silent ways. She envied the gayety and humor with which many a hard toiler glorifies his days and bears the best of witness to the goodness of the God who made him. It was impossible for her to be like that. Pleasure is a delicate plant, in palace or hovel, and soonest feels the taint of lawlessness; sorrow is a more faithful friend. Pleasure is the momentary freedom of those that are like each other; sorrow is the bond that binds the unlike into one family.

However, Lilla did not long torment herself over her own lack of buoyancy. That, too, was part of God's will; a tribute, perhaps, to the good necessarily absent.

She saw Gardiner once more after this. It was in February. Arnold must have long been back in New York, but she had no knowledge of it. She had occasion to go to Jersey City, and was seated in the ferry-boat. Jeffreys came strolling through the long, crowded room, but did not see her, nor she him, till he had passed. He turned about at the door and looked carefully down the line of passengers, and then he saw her. She wondered that he started so violently; she had thought him too much master of himself. He did not disappear at once, either, as she expected. He stood so long facing her, pulling his brown mustache this way and that, that she had a momentary fear he meant to speak to her. She fixed her eyes elsewhere, and when she looked again he was gone, and she did not see him again. She thought, on reflection, that he might have felt some repentance for his hard words.

CHAPTER XXVI.

On a bright morning in early April, Clara Vanderzee was surprised to see her sister entering her bedroom at what was to Belle an extremely early hour, namely, a quarter of an hour before the nine o'clock breakfast. Belle had returned the night before from a trip to Seabright, and this was practically their first opportunity for sisterly confidences. Clara had her bit of news, and soon brought it out.

"I have seen Mr. Gardiner on the street since you went away. He has changed since I saw him last."

"Did you ask why he does not come here any more?"

"No," said Clara with a slight frown. "You know father does not like to have him."

"He 'd like it perfectly well, if he came often enough."

"That may be your opinion; we need not discuss the point. Jeffreys has really changed, Belle. His troubles have aged him. Five months have told on him more than five years should do."

"I have brought you the morning paper," said Belle.

"Is there anything interesting?"

"Something of local interest."

She handed the paper to her sister, pointing to the marriage column, and Clara read as follows: —

"At Seabright, N. J., on the 3d instant, by the Rev. John Kendricks, Thomas Jeffreys Gardiner to Belle, daughter of Peter Vanderzee, both of New York."

"Belle, what do you mean?" cried Clara with a little shriek.

"Don't be grieved, Clara. I wanted dreadfully to tell you, but I really could n't."

"You are married to him?"

"Quite so."

"You unfortunate girl! Why, Belle, you knew very well that father would have consented, if Jeffreys had been in earnest."

"Yes, and if father had consented, Jeffreys would n't have been in earnest. Most ticklish business I ever engaged in. When he was coming on very fairly, father would n't hear of it. When father was relenting, Jeffreys would disappear."

"And you were willing to urge it?"

"Willing 's no word for it. You should have been there to see, Clara, — my obdurate parents, my unhappy life, — mentioned very discreetly, of course. Don't you see, a fine wedding was what he dreaded. This was so simple, small, and convenient."

"Oh, Belle, was it a wedding at all?"

"Don't you be alarmed, dear. Straight as a gun."

"And you came back here at once?"

"Next train. Jeffreys suggested a trip first, but that would n't do. He said he could n't stand as-

sisting at the disclosure, reading it in the papers, etc. I told him he 'd better go away till time should assuage his mortification, and I 'd enjoy it for two."

"He may never come back."

"So I used to think often during the winter, but he always did; and now since yesterday I 've got a terrible advantage, — religion, duty, and inclination all pulling the same way."

"And how does he expect to face your father and mother?"

"I did n't think to ask him."

"Belle, my little sister! how could you? A man thrown over by another woman and loving her still! How could you condescend to think of such a thing?"

"Because I love him no end, that 's why. Why, Clara, there 's no way out for him in that affair. There 's nothing but misery for him there. It 's hard, of course, to accept it as necessary, but when you 've once done that, the worst of it 's over."

"And you led him on, and met him away from your own home?"

"Long walks, lovely talks, repeated trips to my poor, dear, innocent aunties, at Seabright, and everything, you know, just by accident. Last Christmas it nearly fell through."

"You had begun this business before Christmas?"

"Oh, yes," said Belle with a queer look.

"Well?"

"Well, about Christmas time he saw Miss Wilton again, and was as blue as blue. I had a perfectly terrible time. I own frankly that for a few days I gave it up altogether; he was so unmanageable.

My courage came back, however, — a long time before he did, but in less than a month he was asking for one last walk with me."

Belle stopped to laugh.

"I conceded one more. I knew all the moves after that. Oh, it was unreasonable. No sane man would surrender his own happiness just to make some one else uncomfortable. I knew perfectly well that could n't last."

"And you are Mrs. Gardiner," said Clara reflectively. "You will open a large house, I suppose, and do everything royally. Jeffreys would like that, and you would not object."

"I am not so sure," said Belle soberly. "It might not be good for him. I think I shall go abroad. Jeffreys does n't suit me in all respects, and is n't too old to be improved. It won't hurt his health either to run off a little flesh. He is not to smoke so much. He 'll be another man."

"He will have to be, to submit to you. I can tell you, you have married a man who will do things his own way."

Belle smiled carelessly.

"Oh, yes. His way! my way! I 'll have him so muddled he won't know the difference. There, father is calling us. I suppose the breakfast-bell must have rung. Come on, Clara. Now for the ghastly revelation, the sky-rending thunder, the pathos, the indignation, and amazement. But all the bluster of to-day can't hurt the little quiet words of yesterday."

Belle's determination that her marriage should be

widely recognized had led her to see that notice was sent at once to the newspapers, and though her parents insisted the more on her complete seclusion, and the whole family refused themselves to visitors, having thereby the more leisure to bestow on the culprit, this atmosphere of gloom and reprobation failed to subdue her exultation. She retired to her room, and, lying on the sofa, surrounded herself with printed testimony to her new name and dignity; then taking up a novel, she dismissed her sister with decision.

"Don't talk of duties, Clara. Just now I have none. I am a visitor here, and am shocked that you should expect anything of me. Go and attend to your family. Here I am, and here I stay. If not called for within ten days, Mrs. Gardiner will take care of herself."

On this same morning Mrs. Willcox presented herself at Mrs. Miller's. She had discovered that the latter had practical knowledge as to small shirts and slips and other baby's wear, which were now engaging her attention. She had come in a carriage, and going directly to Mrs. Miller's office had found there Laura Kelway, and was informed of the announcement of Gardiner's marriage.

"Jim is hopeless," cried Bessie. "He never reads me the interesting parts of the paper. I do think I must always look over the marriages and deaths for myself. There are really few people in New York one does n't know something about. But excuse me, Miss Kelway, for rushing in upon you in this way. You may want Mrs. Miller to yourself."

"Not at all," said Laura. "What little more I have to say need be no secret from you. I don't know whether to feel sorry or glad for Miss Wilton. I did think that she had herself broken the engagement; but few people will believe it, now that he is married, and she is living in this retirement. However, it is a small matter what people think."

"I am sure it is to her," put in Mrs. Miller. "Whoever had the wit to break off the engagement, it was a blessing to her. I have seen her at her present home, and she is a new woman. The change is really marvelous."

"Now, Mrs. Miller," said Bessie appealingly, "is it necessary to live in a cheap tenement and dress like a Sister of Mercy just because you have made up your mind to live decently like other people? I am ever so glad she is doing better, you know, and all that, but really other people have been doing it all along without blotting the social landscape in this way. I never have liked a philanthropic uniform; it 's a slur on the rest of us. We are none of us civilians in that warfare. I think one person ought to be as virtuous as another, and as much so week-days as Sundays."

"When her duty is wholly clear to her," said Mrs. Miller, "she may feel happier. I have my children, you know, and you your husband. Our duties are not far to seek."

When Miss Kelway had left, Bessie inquired Miss Wilton's address, saying that she had something special to say to her.

"Then go towards evening," said Mrs. Miller.

"She is often out all day. But need you go? She would be quite ready to call on you, if you wish her to do so."

"I will drive," said Bessie. "Jim is a perfect goose about me, but he lets me do one thing a day, and this will please him."

The next evening found Mrs. Willcox knocking at Lilla's door. She had spoken on the stairs with Mrs. Raynor, and expected next to meet the blackleg, Howard. She felt as if she were in Bohemia at last, and dreaded lest Miss Wilton might be entertaining some very unconventional company. She had come after dark, which made her the more suspicious of her surroundings.

Lilla was alone, however, and was sewing by lamplight. She was much surprised, and after a critical glance at her visitor, hastened to offer her a chair.

"And you climbed the stairs to see me?" she said. "You should have written to me to come to you."

"That is not the usual method, when one's object is to ask forgiveness."

"Forgiveness?" repeated Lilla.

"Yes," said Bessie firmly. "I won't go into it in detail; Mr. Willcox does not like to have me get excited. For the same reason you must n't argue the matter. I suppose I had my reasons, but the sum of it all is that if I had not been there to interfere with what was none of my business, — if my blessed — my husband, that is, had been left to do with his own money according to his own heart, you would not have been put through so much misery.

Now, if you can deny that, you will make my early morning meditations much happier."

Lilla was much touched.

"I can say this," she began.

"Do not," said Bessie appealingly. "There are other 'if's,' of course, and you will make every generous interpretation. The fact remains that I chose to look at you ungenerously, unfairly, that I was unwomanly to another woman. You had better let me say it, Miss Wilton. I shall then be rid of it, as far as I now can be. Nothing would induce me to say it, except that it is true. So don't contradict me, but forgive me."

"I do forgive you, Mrs. Willcox, if that is what you wish to hear. You are very good to come and say this to me."

"I want one proof of your forgiveness. Please don't refuse me. You know that large debt of yours at the frightful interest. I want you to owe that two thousand dollars to me. I can get the money."

"You are kind indeed, but let me tell you how it is. I no longer pay that rate of interest. Mr. Gardiner paid the debt for me during our engagement, so I owe it to him at usual rates. As yet I have not been able to repay him, but — can you understand it? — I dread the time when I shall be able. It will hurt him."

"Do you think it will now?"

"Now?"

Bessie raised her head in surprise. She had not thought to be the bearer of any news.

"His marriage was announced in yesterday's papers."

"His marriage?"

"Day before yesterday — privately — to Miss Belle Vanderzee."

Bessie had by no means expected the look of consternation and misery that came over Lilla's face. She was privately inclined to think this marriage a very good thing, but she was forced to believe that Lilla had a different opinion. Her heart was softening fast in this neighborhood to the woman she had so long distrusted. The thought of her own happiness, past and to come, made her full of compassion.

"Mrs. Willcox," said Lilla pitifully, "I wish God would let me pass out of this life to one less cruel."

"Why, is it so bad?" cried Bessie, alarmed, and to Lilla's dismay, she burst into tears.

"Ah, Mrs. Willcox, please don't cry. You don't know how timely your offer is to me now. Can you really help me to pay my debt to Mr. Gardiner? I have saved a good deal towards it myself."

"It is too late," continued Bessie, sobbing.

"It is just in time," said Lilla with recovered composure. "You misunderstand me. See, my water is just boiling. You will take a cup of tea with me, will you not? and then you will be expected home. I have sugar and cream in the closet here. I call milk cream when it has risen three stories, don't you?"

Mrs. Willcox broke into a short laugh in the midst of her tears.

"See what I am making," pursued Lilla, taking up her work. "You would never guess that it is

called a traveling-bag. Have you heard of the Orthopædic Hospital, where they care for deformed children? They are to send some of their children to Long Island for a fortnight, and I, with one of their nurses, am to have charge of them. One of the boys begged me to make this bag for him. It is copied from one he liked."

"When do you go?" asked Bessie, becoming interested.

"Day after to-morrow."

"You like children, don't you?"

"When they 're good, I love them dearly, and these are very good. I think it must have been cripples whom they brought to our Lord. Certainly some well children one would like to send bears after, as Elisha did."

Mrs. Willcox laughed again, to Lilla's great content, and soon was quite happy over her tea. Before she left she inquired if Lilla had heard from Mrs. Meredith.

"I had a letter in January from Munich."

"She is now in the Tyrol," said Bessie. "I don't believe Munich was good for her, and at any rate she was then nursing her little Florence, who had a severe fever. Mrs. Meredith is herself far from well."

"May I ask how you heard?"

"I went to inquire of Mr. Robertson. Mr. Meredith has written to his friends most anxiously about his wife's health. Mr. Robertson said it was pitiful to see these letters, and that in a letter to himself he almost asked him to come over."

"What is the illness?"

"Mr. Robertson mentioned none. She seems to be fading away."

Bessie was sorry to close her visit with such dismal news. She had watched Lilla closely, and had noticed the lack of vigor and rebound with which she met evil tidings. They seemed to hang like added millstones about her neck. She said as she rose: —

"Our weather is becoming springlike, is n't it? Do you enjoy this milder temperature?"

"Not yet, I fear," said Lilla. "I usually like warm weather, too, but the first onset of it is trying."

Mrs. Willcox drove away with many reflections in her active brain, some of which proved of service to Lilla. In the first place she did succeed in becoming Miss Wilton's creditor for all that was needed to relieve her of her debt to Gardiner, and then by repeating emphatically to Hattie Granger her opinion of Miss Wilton's physical condition, she brought about a delightful arrangement. On Lilla's return from Long Island, the artist went to see her, and urged her to accompany her on her usual spring visit to the cottage among the hills of Walpole. The plan did not at once commend itself to Lilla, but Miss Granger was so decided, and her own usefulness in New York was so slight since the warm weather had set in, that she yielded; and Miss Granger, with more gladness of heart than she had felt till then since Bessie's engagement, went on beforehand to the cottage to make preparations.

One pleasant morning towards the last of April, Arnold Robertson walked up the lane towards Miss

Granger's cottage. Wholly unaware of the romance which in Willcox's eyes was attached to that lane, that gate, and the trees where a hammock had once swung, he passed all without concern, and had no recognition for the bashful Maria, who stood watching him from the stoop at the side of the cottage. He learned from her that the young lady was out and Miss Granger in her studio. Asking to see Miss Granger, he was shown into a closed and deserted sitting-room, and there abandoned.

After a few moments he began to chafe at Miss Granger's delay. He had had but one question to ask, and should have asked it at the door of her studio, which he now saw was in a shed further up the hill. Outside, the spring wind was stirring joyously in the new foliage, and here he had allowed himself to be imprisoned as in a box.

After fully ten minutes Miss Granger came, her hair newly brushed and a deep lace collar about her neck. This was held by a breastpin of Florentine mosaic. Her figure was as tall and gaunt as ever, but her face beamed with welcome, and she shook his hand with the boyish cordiality she wore when embarrassed.

"I will not pretend," she said, "that your visit is to me unexpected. Bessie has written me confidentially that you were soon coming, but I did not think of your asking to see me as well. The politeness is far from lost, I assure you. Maria had to reassure me more than once."

"I should be sorry indeed to miss seeing you," said Arnold, rising to the occasion; "I trust your

work will not suffer too seriously from my forwardness."

They both sat down, and Robertson felt that even in that dim spot she had already noticed his entire dress, from his blue sailor's coat and white flannel shirt to his brown shoes and the straw hat in his hands.

"Perhaps I should apologize," he said, smiling. "I understood that Miss Wilton was affecting great simplicity of dress, and I meant to be quite in keeping; but failing to suit myself in corduroy and blouses, I betook myself to the simplest phase of city fashions."

"You have done well, Mr. Robertson. A gentleman never looks better than in shooting or boating costume."

Arnold restrained his inclination to rise and bow, though he felt sure he would have been repaid by a courtesy. The situation was becoming comical.

"Miss Wilton is well, I hope?"

"Not very well, Mr. Robertson. She is heavy-hearted. I invited her here with the avowed intention of leaving her much to herself. My invitation would not otherwise have been acceptable. She takes short walks, and sits under the trees reading. Then we drive out together after the necessary provisions. The air must at last do her good; at least, so I assure myself, when I see her still so spiritless. Would you like to see a new sketch I am making of her?"

"I should be delighted."

Miss Granger led the way out, holding doors

open for him and then yielding the point as he in turn held them open for her. He cast a longing look far and near before entering the studio. Here the artist placed a sketch on the easel.

"This — why, Miss Granger, this is no new sketch."

"No, this is the old one. It is the same one you criticised so severely."

"If it is the same, I was an idiot."

"I have changed it materially. Miss Wilton came to my studio after you saw it. Now this is the new one."

She placed another canvas by the side of the old. The difference was that between day and night; the first, happy, thoughtless, almost roguish, with rare beauty in eyes and forehead; the last, a revelation of sorrow, yet redeemed by a beauty ethereal and peaceful. The dress was black, the eyes and mouth — Arnold's heart rose to his throat.

"Is she now like that?"

"To me she seems so."

"This is wonderful work, Miss Granger. It is from the heart."

"Yes, it is that at least. To me she has been the ideal woman. She has taken possession of me. What other women are *like* in their happier moments, she *is*. Her height, her eyes, her manner, her thoughts almost, have sunk so deeply into me that I have no standard left by which to measure her imperfections. You will laugh, perhaps, at this woman's infatuation. It was so from the first; and, lest I should outgrow my first love, she has put on

this new perfection. Ah, Mr. Robertson, if I could change my sex and my century, I would wear her colors and fight her battles. Even now I have outdone every man that has seen her. I have painted her, Mr. Robertson. What man has done that? I have loved her, and I have expressed it in a way that will last."

"I acknowledge it," said Robertson.

"How can men deny that women are nobler than themselves, when women as well as men, once past the age of selfishness, bring homage to the same shrine! Does it not seem as if women belonged to some nobler race and in this world could not but be mismated?"

"Well, really, Miss Granger," —

"Oh, I know," interrupted the artist wearily. "I am several centuries too early with my demand. Men's superiority is inborn and beyond question."

"I do not think of myself as superior."

"How can you help it? Is it not men who can do everything? Are not their lives the important ones? Take any of the numberless sacrifices a woman makes of her personal dignity, her activity, for the sake of a man, and reverse the sexes. Would any one be pleased with that result? Can you talk away such a proof as that?"

"And where do you get the idea that voluntary love and service is a mark of inferiority? Not from the New Testament, I think. The ideal of service is spreading even among men, my brutal contemporaries. It must spread, and that soon, to make even business relations endurable. To tell the truth,

Miss Granger, your problem has little interest for me. I take things more as they come. If I find in a woman things that are above me, I rejoice; if the reverse, I am glad, too, for it gives me a chance of expressing my devotion."

"Well," said Miss Granger with a sigh of relief, "I am glad you don't think yourself superior. You are the only instance of the kind, so far as I know."

"Then what a huge, satirical drama life becomes for the delectation of the keener-witted sex! But really, Miss Granger, I must cut myself somewhat short, for my time is limited. Is there a chance of my finding Miss Wilton?"

"She took the path to the brook. I will show you how to strike it."

Arnold was free at last, walking through the sun-lit-path towards her face. How meaningless Miss Granger's perplexities seemed to him! Did he feel superior, inferior, or equal to the woman he was about to meet? Not one of them. In his lightness of heart he leaped from rock to stump, and soon had reached the brook hid in budding thickets of beech and alder. There were steppping-stones a little farther on. Which side and which way? Up the brook he could see far over the rough and swampy ground; she was not in sight. It must be down, then, and he chose the path on the nearer side of the brook. At first he could not see the water which murmured so pleasantly; but farther down it came out into a dell of locust-trees. At the lower end of this opening a beautiful oak, yet bare, sent its roots into the brook, and among them lay Lilla, her left

hand under her face, her right dipped in the running water. Pale she was in face, black in dress, but she wore a bunch of yellow dandelions. She raised her head and then sat up, startled.

"It's deep, isn't it?" said Arnold, smiling at her from across the brook.

"You should have crossed at the stepping-stones."

Her answer was breathless, her eyes reproachful.

Robertson stepped back, then with a run and a leap he cleared the brook successfully. He looked down at her averted head, then, laying aside his hat, he took a seat on an oak-root below hers, so that he could see her face. It was thin and worn.

"I have come," he said, "for a different and a better answer."

"Ah, Mr. Robertson, how have matters changed since you promised to accept my decision?"

"How? Well, if Miss Granger had not just undermined all my confidence in masculine intelligence, I should say they had completely changed."

"Because Mr. Gardiner has married, when he does not even live with his wife?"

"He does. They have taken rooms at the Warwick. I have been very solicitous as to his happiness, and am told he is looking very cheerful, and that he will take his bride to Europe for the summer months."

"How does that affect my duty?"

"Like this, perhaps. Up to this time, if he had informed himself of your solitude and general density of gloom, he might possibly say to himself, 'It is because she cares for my feelings and my welfare;'

after this, if he notices the same phenomena, he will say with greater assurance, 'It is because she does n't care for his,' meaning mine. Any other idea would not dawn on his mind."

"But if his happiness does not last?"

"Then it is certainly his fault. Ah, Lilla, am I not to smile except when Mr. Gardiner is amused? I confess to a longing for a separate existence, however humble."

"I know you are patient with me," said Lilla, her eyes suddenly filling. "No other man would do as you have done. I suppose I do not see things as I ought, but I can't, and I am so miserable."

"It is you who must be patient with me."

"I don't understand myself," went on Lilla, "and why I cannot smile and be happy like another woman. I have seen such things during the last few months that my courage to enjoy myself has wholly gone out of me, — hunger and rags, hopeless, endless toil, unspeakable degradation, cruelty, uncleanness. Jeffreys told me the world had to be built on a base of misery, a shining image with feet of clay, but it is deadly to me to think of such contrasts. I cannot endure it."

"Have you been happy in your own efforts against all this?"

"Not happy; but it is better than the horror of doing nothing. What I do is so little compared with the natural progress of one day of civilization towards evil. It is partly my own fault. I have so little hope or strength. I feel as if I could be no true Christian to be so weighed down. While in

the city in this trying weather I felt that I was helping no one, and so I accepted Miss Granger's kindness. But in New York there were a few poor things glad to see me. Here I am utterly useless and miserable."

"A hopeful and efficient state of mind," said Arnold.

Lilla made no answer, and he continued.

"The evil and the degradation cannot be denied, and we are obliged to see it all with the vision, as it were, of God himself, while in action we are but men; but we are men acting within that mighty Spirit of holiness which leaves no man without a touch of its sway. We are all under leadership, and a Christian is a man who is given up to this leadership; then, being fully committed to the service, he does not carry his Master's burdens as well as his own. There is a vast amount to be done. I am not one who thinks that our social constitution gives all the help that can be expected of it. There are horrible iniquities in our land of freedom. But what man has done, man can undo, while the natural burden and sorrow of mortal life is of God and needs no undoing."

Robertson was silent a few minutes, then went on.

"This makes me think of Mrs. Meredith. My last letter from her was inexpressibly sad. Till now I have heard of the state of her health only through others, but now she says herself very simply that she has not long to live. She says that she cannot bear to have her children educated abroad,

and that she hoped — you and I would have some oversight of them here, if she sent them home to school. There are relatives, of course; there is Mrs. Lemuel Gordon, who, I should suppose, would more naturally take such a responsibility, but Mrs. Gordon could not go over for them."

Robertson paused again, but Lilla had nothing to say.

"I suppose you know that I have been doing some building in the tenement line, and I have had thoughts of crossing the water on that business, taking with me a young fellow, an architect, and discovering some improvements on the present stupid and homely methods of building. Now that I have this letter from Mrs. Meredith, I am the more anxious to go soon."

"And do you feel more easy about Mrs. Monroe?"

"She is failing undoubtedly, but may live a year or two. They don't call it consumption, it seems. She is to return to Philadelphia, and my sister will open our house."

"But you do not live at home, you said."

"No, I haven't done so. I have had a room near the tenements I have been building. I need help and advice, for I want a pretty home, but I want one that others will feel free to come to. I don't want a whole list of possessions with my initials in the corner. I want to be human, if I can possibly discover the way. I want your help, Lilla; I want you."

His words were abrupt and determined, and he

himself so near that she scarcely had to move to put her hand in his, and then his arms were about her.

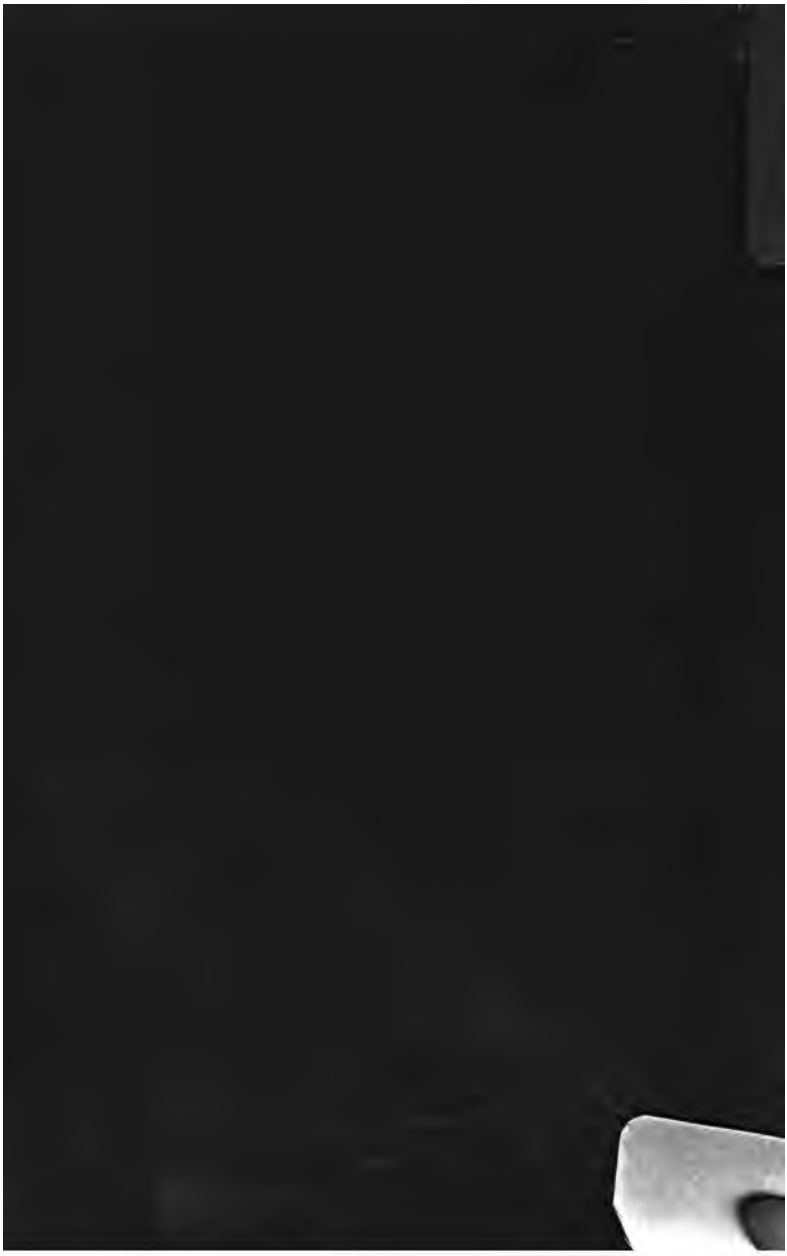
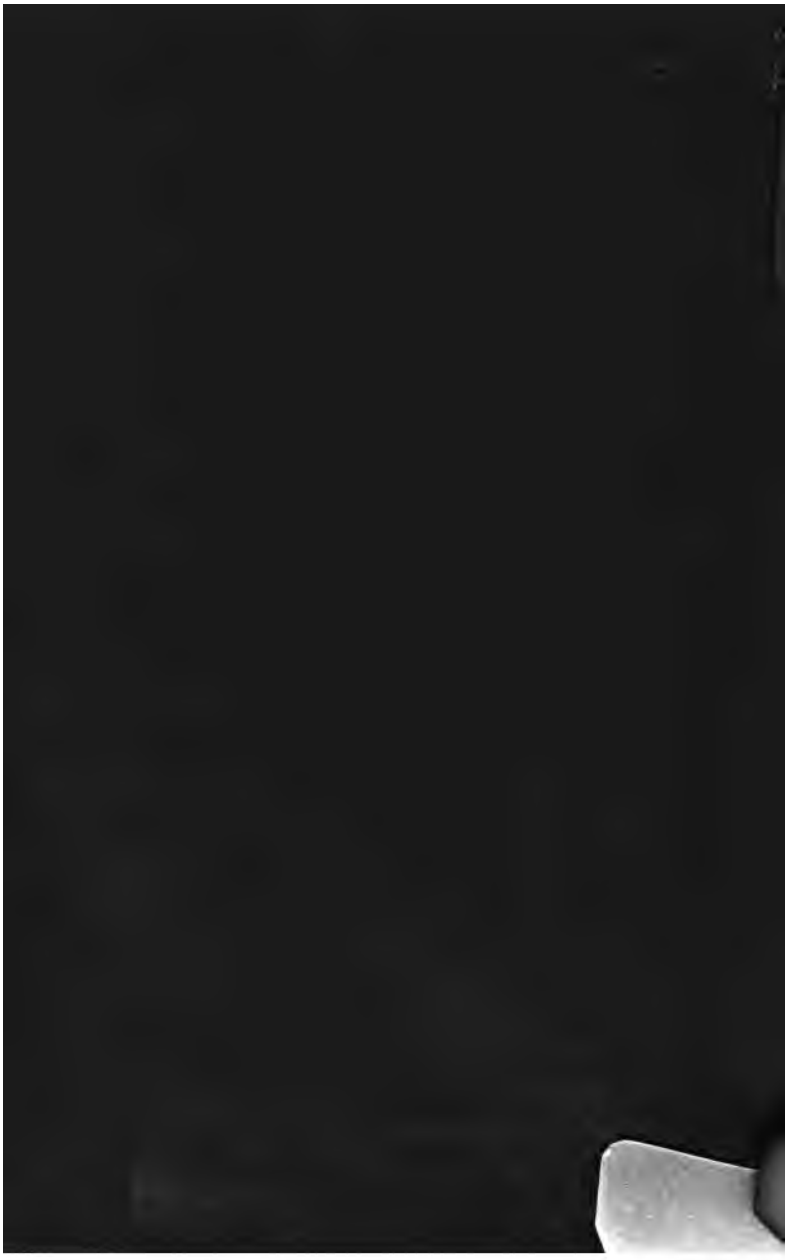
How suddenly the music of the brook rose into notice! Before, it had vainly glided over its pebbles and oak-roots and through the flags beyond. Now, it filled the air. And the breeze in the locust-trees, — Lilla thought that that gentle whisper had but now arisen. Safe at last. She had listened to that brook while alone. It had been but water slipping over the stones. Now it flowed inwardly through her soul, and what it said was, "forever, forever!"

"How soft your hair is," said Arnold, after they had long sat in silence. "It is a luxury just to touch it."

"And you do not want luxuries."

"It will soon be a necessity. Beauty is a necessity, not a luxury."

"I am not beautiful," said Lilla, her voice trembling. "I am not even what I used to be. I wish I were so, — for your sake."

Robertson did not think it necessary to reply.

"But you, Arnold," went on Lilla, struggling to find words, "how can I tell you! When I remember what I was when I came home from Europe! I might have been anything. I saw your face on the steamer, and even then it made a difference. You cannot know what I was without you, for from the first I was different with you; and soon you were always with me; you judged every thought of my heart. But this was not enough. I must be led to have a life of my own. To love you as I did then would have been a fetter to you, and to me more like